Paris, France
May 30/30

To the Girl Friend,
from the
Boy friend
with love

SLEEVELESS ERRAND

FIRST PARIS EDITION, 1929

SLEEVELESS ERRAND

A NOVEL

BY

NORAH C. JAMES

PREFACE BY

EDWARD GARNETT

HENRY BABOU AND JACK KAHANE
1, RUE VERNIQUET. PARIS
1929

"Sleeveless Errand :—
Ending in, or leading to nothing"

The Oxford Dictionary

All the characters represented in this book
are entirely imaginary.

PREFACE

The censoring and suppression of Sleeveless Errand *by the Home Office, at Bow street, March* 4, 1929, *is a perfect example of official blundering. It adds the last link to the chain of the follies of censorship, which works inevitably to suppress the wrong books. After the Prosecution had overwhelmed the novel and its author, with a flood of vulgar abuse—"foul stuff... a terrible book... indecent situations... degrading muck", etc., Mr. Arnold Bennett* (Evening Standard, *March* 7) *declared* Sleeveless Errand *to be "an absolutely merciless exposure of neurotics and decadents, and I should say that the effect of it on the young reader would have been to destroy in him all immoral and unconventional impulses for ever and ever". And next, the Editor of* The New Statesman, *who began by accusing and ended by blessing, confessed, "we deny confidently that the book could possibly do any harm to anyone... The book is a good book... but it contains certain verbal obscenities which are unnecessary to the telling of an essentially clean tale".*

What are these 'verbal obscenities'? They are simply swear words, and bad language such as 'Bloody Hell', used mostly by the unfortunate heroine, Paula, words which have been printed time and time again in many novels. I may cite a modern novel in particular, Fiesta, *by Ernest Hemingway, a story which, not accused of obscenity or proceeded against by the Home Office, deals in much the same way, with a similar set of characters.*

No, it is evident from the indiscriminate abuse hurled against Sleeveless Errand *by the Counsel for the Prosecution :—*

"The story" continued Mr. Clarke "is told in the form of conversations by persons entirely devoid of decency and morality, who for the most part are under the influence of drink and not only tolerated, but definitely tolerated, promiscuity. Blasphemy is freely indulged in by all the characters, and filthy language and indecent situations appear to be the keynote. It is amazing that such a collection of degrading muck should be printed by any firm... The name of God or Christ is taken in vain in a way which shocks one."

It is evident, I say, that neither the Home Secretary, nor his official advisers, had fathomed the author's purpose or the sound morality of the story. Functioning as respectable British officials, without any literary sense to guide them, quivering with moral indignation at such unusual scenes as that which especially scandalized the Crown prosecutor,—the scene where a man and a woman

actually get into bed and lie talking calmly, without matrimonial intentions!—the Home Secretary's advisers had no doubt on the point that the existence of Sleeveless Errand *was an outrage on British propriety. So armed with the might and majesty of the Law, backed by the London Morality Council, zealous in his mission to clear out the literary Augean stable, Sir William Joynson-Hicks set the official guillotine in motion, Crown Prosecutor, Council for the Crown, Bow Street magistrate and all, and suppressed "this good book... that could not possibly do any harm to anyone."*

How British! in its mixture of moral righteousness and official Pecksniffery. And that is why Sleeveless Errand, *banished from Albion's virtuous shore, appears in a new edition across the Channel.*

Edward Garnett.

March 30, 1929.

PHILIP resented her intensely at that moment. He resented her control; he resented her beauty, because it no longer moved him ; above all he resented the fact that she had not reached the same stage of discontent as he had.

" Then there's nothing more to say—I'll just go," Paula said. She thought, " If only he doesn't want to talk about it I shall be able to clear out decently. If I can go away at once it will be all right." But Philip could not let her do that—after all he had just told her that their relationship of the past year must end—that he wanted it on a new footing—that he wanted to be her friend, not her lover. He had put her chair so that the light would be behind her in the event of her becoming distressed during their talk. And here she was saying in a quiet voice that there was nothing to discuss. He said,

" Oh ! come, Paula, you can't go just like that. I want to feel certain that you realise it's for the best."

She could not speak—sobs, which she tried with every atom of control to stifle, rose to her throat—her nails dug into her palms—every muscle was tense with her effort. Through a film of hot tears she could see the

firelight flickering in the centre of a star. A memory flashed into her mind; Walking along Marylebone Road, the night her mother died, the street lamps she passed had looked like stars and radiated long flickering lines of light in the same way. She thought:

"I must have been crying that night too."

With all her will power she tried not to let the realisation of what was happening come into her consciousness. She would not listen to what Philip was saying; she would not remember that he had ceased to be her lover; that she would never sleep with him again; never feel his weight upon her eager limbs; or his lips moving from her mouth to her breasts. Philip was watching her intently. He realised now, too late, that she was not going to take his decision calmly. He began to feel her agony. He wished the nerve at the corner of her lips would stop twitching. She looked helpless and young lying back in the chair, trying to keep her mouth firm. He could see tears overflowing, running unchecked down her cheeks. He wished it hadn't had to happen like this.

A long-forgotten memory came back to him suddenly—how he had once seen his mother look like this. One early summer day, with his family, he had started out for a picnic—he remembered vividly the wood where they went—the sort of wood children

adored—full of beech trees and sudden spaces. The shafts of sun almost blinded you to the patches of bluebells that lay beneath the trees. There had been lots of dry twigs and sticks about with which to build a fire. He and the rest of the children had gathered a big pile, whilst his mother unpacked the basket in which were the food and tea things. Then it was discovered that the matches had been forgotten. How his father had raged—one of those storms of anger that desolate and terrify the onlookers. The children had huddled together and hated him, till presently his mother had begun to cry silently, just as Paula was doing now. It had been awful—they had packed up without having the picnic and gone home. It had been his mother's " birthday."

He pulled himself up in his thoughts abruptly—all damned muddle-headed sentiment minding things like that. Human beings must be hard if they didn't want to be hurt. Because he felt unhappy he became curt in tone. He must make Paula speak again. He must make her take this thing sensibly.

"I could have written all this to you, Paula, but it wouldn't have seemed decent," he said.

She made a last effort to keep her voice steady.

" I wish you had, Phil."

Then the storm swept over her—sobs that are checked overlong are always more bitter when they break their way through. To Philip sitting with clenched hands and grim face, they were horrible—for a human being to lose control like that—he wished to God Clara hadn't forced the scene upon him—why hadn't she given him time to break gently and gradually, instead of refusing to see him again until he had made the position clear to Paula? Must she cry like that; couldn't she understand that she was bringing him perilously near to tears himself? He couldn't stand it another second.

"Paula, for Heaven's sake stop—oh! my dear, don't, I can't bear it."

"Sorry, Phil, I'll be all right in a minute."

"You mustn't mind like this, Paula. I'm not worth it—I never pretended it would last forever, did I? I can't keep to one person, Paula; I have to have change—you know how afraid I am of missing things in life—I can't help it—you knew I was like that, didn't you?—I never tried to make you think otherwise, did I? Oh! Paula, for Christ's sake stop—I can't bear to see you cry. I feel such a cad."

She took a deep breath, one that hurt as it met her sobs.

"I've nothing to live for now, Phil—I'm not going on."

She thought,

" That sounds damned theatrical. "

"Don't be a bloody little fool, Paula." His voice was harsh because he believed that she was speaking for effect, yet was afraid in spite of himself.

" I mean it, my dear. I'm not going on without your love."

" Oh ! damn," Phil said, and rushed out of the room.

She felt sick with weeping. Automatically she began to dab her eyes with her handkerchief. She thought,

" God, I must look pretty awful. Phil thinks I'm just being theatrical about killing myself, but I mean it. The thing is, how am I going to do it ? "

She pushed her hair back off her face.

" Damn, how tired I am ; and I want him horribly—it's Clara who's made him do this. She's probably told him he can choose between us, and he's had me and hasn't had her." The thoughts ran in her head rather jerkily.

" How different the room looks to me to-night ! " She glanced round it curiously.

The divan over against the wall was where she and Phil had first let their passion carry them away completely—it was true what he had said just now, he hadn't ever actually told her that he loved her—only held her closely and roused her by his experienced

caresses—how devastating that rousing had been—she was a virgin then—how her heart had thumped; she had been shy at the feeling of fire which had flooded her entire body, so that she had hidden her face against Phil. He had laughed then, understandingly, and had let his kisses grow more intimate, longer and less restrained. She had thought the pressure of his mouth would suffocate her. Well, any way, she knew where she stood with him now.

Philip came back into the room. He saw that she had stopped crying—and feared that if he spoke she would start again. He thought,

"Good Lord, I'd no idea she was going to take it badly like this."

Over by the window stood a table on which were bottles and glasses. He took up the brandy and poured out a stiff dose. He brought the glass over to her.

"Paula, you must drink this, it will do you good." For a moment she turned her face away from him. Her voice came very slowly and breathlessly.

"No, Phil, I don't want it, I'm so sick of drinking."

"I know," his voice was gentle now, "but drink it up, you need it."

"I've drunk so much these last weeks. Didn't know what was wrong between us.

That's why I wrote and said I wanted to see you to-night, Phil."

" I know, darling, I hoped you'd understand why I was avoiding you and just let me go, but when I got your letter I saw we'd have to have this out—I'm sorry. Drink this up, Paula." Her hands trembled so much that he had to hold the glass to her lips. He had seated himself on the arm of her chair. Habit made him press her head back against his shoulder, and habit made him stroke her hair. She gulped down a few mouthfuls of the brandy. Presently he got up and put the glass back on the table. He came over and drawing her out of the chair, sat down on it, and took her on his knees. She rested in his arms. He felt her shiver.

" You're cold, darling," and bending forward, he picked up the poker and stirred the fire. Presently he said,

" Paula, is there anything I can do for you ? Would you like to stay here with me just for to-night ? "

" No, my dear, it's finished." His hands were caressing her now, closing round her breasts, stroking her shoulders and arms—all the intimate touches their relationship had evolved. She was too stunned to protest. His lips were upon her hair.

" Are you sure ? "

" Quite, Phil."

"You're going to be sensible? You wouldn't do anything silly, Paula, would you? If you did anything rash I'd feel awful." She lay still, completely relaxed in his embrace. What good would it do to tell him once more that she was going to commit suicide? That for her he had been the one hold she still had on life, life which she found horrible in its complete futility. Being with him even in the disturbing once-a-week way of their affair had sufficed. She had had to have some one to love utterly and now it was over. No good trying to explain. It would only make him angry again. In a little while he said,

"Would you like me to see you home, dear, if you really won't stop here?" She shook her head.

"Just give me five minutes more and I'll go along by myself."

"We'll see each other sometimes, Paula. No need to break completely."

"No more, Phil."

"Why?"

"I don't want to."

"Why?"

"I just don't."

"But, by and by, when you've got over it a bit, I'd like to be friends;" he was so sure she would get over it. A faint smile lifted one corner of her mouth. The wind from the

open window stirred the heavy gold and black tapestry curtains. She sighed a deep, deep sigh.

" Kiss me, Phil ? " He put his mouth upon hers. Their kiss was long, but his lips were cool whilst hers burned.

" Stay. "

" No, Phil. Good-bye, my darling ! " She withdrew from his arms and got up. She went out of the room and across the hall to his bedroom where she had left her hat and coat. He was waiting for her by the front door of the flat when she came out. Once more he took her in his arms and she pressed herself fiercely against him.

" Sure you won't change your mind and stay ? "

" No, thank you, Phil."

" You'll be all right alone ? I could easily see you home."

" No thank you, Phil—good-bye, dearest." He winced at that and returned the pressure of her embrace.

" Then good-night, my darling. "

" Good-bye, Phil." She put his arms away from her—opened the door and went out, closing it after her.

" Christ, how perfectly bloody that's been ! " he thought, and walked into the sitting-room to get himself a drink.

Paula went down the stairs. She felt old and ill.

" Must have time," she thought. But not in her own rooms. It was necessary to have people around. You couldn't think otherwise because you'd start crying again and that wouldn't help—but you wanted to avoid the Crowd too. Well, that would be fairly easy because they would be divided at this time between the Red Lion and the Café Royal. It was still early—nine o'clock —where the Hell was the best place to go to ? —You must sit down soon because your legs felt horribly wobbly—a Lyons would be as good as anywhere—no one you knew went there. In a Lyons you could sit and drink coffee and consider the question of ways and means. So Paula took a taxi to the Corner House by Charing Cross Station. She walked straight upstairs to the cloak room. The reflection she saw in the mirror over the wash basin showed her the devastation her tears had made. She bathed her face in cold water and then, with powder, and lip stick, made up carefully. She smiled at herself bitterly—" If only it was as easy to repair an emotional smash-up as it was to repair your complexion ! " Two prostitutes talking as they washed their hands at the next basin, stopped to stare at her. She turned away hastily and went out through the swing doors.

" My eye, Dolly, when I look like that I'll shut up shop. No boy's going to pay good money to a tragedy queen, even if she's as good looking as the Virgin Mary."

" Don't know about that, dearie—some of 'em are queer—seem to like them sad—not that that bitch was one of us."

" But her smile, Dolly, it gave me the willies."

" Oh ! well, never mind her. Buck up and we'll see what we can find. You know, Daise, I think I'll give up wearing suspenders. They ladder all my stockings. Here's another pair new on to-day gone west. Blast it !— What'll I do ? "

" Borrow a needle and cotton from the old girl—she's a good sort—helped me one night when I was fearfully fried."

The attendant sitting in the corner, nodding, came to life as they approached.

" A needle—why yes, dearie. Though the cotton won't match your stocking, I'm afraid." The girl took the proffered needle and cotton.

" Thanks, mother."

" You're welcome."

" Well, thank you."

Downstairs Paula found an empty table and ordered coffee. It was good coffee. She thought Lyons's a queer place. You could be practically certain of not meeting people

you knew. Who did come here ? She looked around, " Yes, it was full of the kind of men and women you never met, except in trains and 'buses. Well, you'd better start thinking about how to die—think of the whole matter impersonally—dissociate it from yourself, otherwise you might start crying again even here—that would be too bloody. But how could you dissociate it from yourself when you were filled with the terror of once more being alone. Well, why be ? Why not go straight off to one of the men you know who wanted you ? Simply because it wouldn't help at all. You'd still be absolutely alone inside. What does it all mean, this loving business ? The joy in one person and the meaninglessness of every other ? Long ago in the War, after you and Desmond had made up your minds to get married on his next leave, and he had been killed a week later, there had come the realisation of the agony of love. That time, because of the pitch of excitement at which you were living, you hadn't thought of killing yourself. Just drunk a great deal when you weren't working like Hell, so that there hadn't been time to think about it frightfully. But afterwards you'd realised that you couldn't bear to be alone very much, just filled up the days with people, people, people. Most of them bored you

stiff half the time. Sometimes for a little while you found a man you cared about rather, but until Phil happened you hadn't known exactly how much you needed to be in love. You couldn't face up to that loneliness without him again. You weren't just going to get drunk for the next six months till your health broke down. It simply wasn't good enough. But this question of suicide required a little while to think out in detail. Enough time to tear up letters, arrange various things and make a will. No, not your will, fool! But anyway, it would take a little time to put everything in order for that somebody who was contemplating suicide. And the next thing, was how to do it? The river was out of the question because you were a good swimmer. The gas? No, not that. Probably the best way was over that high cliff you knew in the Seven Sisters—safe enough—in a car—that would mean hiring one. Thank God you could drive and had plenty of money. Pretty awful to have your choice of suicide limited by the amount of cash you possessed.

A man walked towards her, between the row of tables she was sitting at and the next. He had one of those lean, dark, good-looking faces that are seen everywhere in England. He might be a doctor, a lawyer, or an

engineer. As a matter of fact, Bill Cheland was an architect.

The thing he had just discovered about his wife was still unreal to him. " Christ ! Laura couldn't have let him down like that, and with Everard. It couldn't be true. Yet he'd seen it for himself. Damnation ! this wouldn't do, he must think of something else—anything—greyhound racing—could you depend on Salmon's delivery date for that cement at Basingstoke ?—It couldn't be true. He loved her so. Laura, Laura—" It was at this moment of his thoughts that he scraped back the vacant chair at Paula's table and sat down heavily. The waitress came up. She said to Bill,

" What can I get for you ? "

" A cup of black coffee, please."

" Anything more for you, Miss ? "

" Another coffee, please." With an expert flick of her cloth the waitress turned away.

Paula thought,

" Wish to God there was someone I could talk to. Lots of the Crowd are all right, but not for this sort of thing. Their tongues are miles too long—besides, they regard gossip or scandal about one of us as belonging to all the rest. Thank heaven, Phil isn't known much—"

The coffee came. Paula and Bill each put out a hand for the sugar basin at the same

moment. As they drew back, their glances met.

" You're having a bloody time, too," she thought, seeing his eyes.

" God ! " he thought, " you've got an unhappy-looking face." They gazed into their cups, each thinking along the same lines. " I can't go on living." For the present, Bill's sorrow at his discovery was overshadowed by a surging wave of jealousy which, sweeping every other emotion aside, made him feel sick with rage and hatred. "Laura in Everard's embrace, her lips against his, her body caressed by his hands." Bill grew rigid—why had he crept out like that unseen, instead of gripping Everard by the throat and tearing him away. Because civilised people didn't behave like that—civilised people be damned ! He ought to have smashed his fist into the swine's face. He wanted to now. All the stupid little inanities about husbands and wives living their own lives and having their own friends of the other sex. It was just damned rot. If you married, then your wife ought to be decent enough to stick to you, unless she decided she couldn't bear you any more. Damn Everard ! Those things she'd said—only last week after they'd had that jolly dinner on her birthday. " My lover," and, " You're the only person I love in all the world really." Her words meant

nothing at all then. Bloody Hell ! Probably she'd said the very same phrases to Everard too in moments of passion. "Damn Everard, O God, damn him !" Fine beads of sweat gathered on Bill's forehead. The room began to swim before his eyes. He felt deathly sick and a feeling of heaviness pressed at the pit of his stomach. He knew that he was going to faint and pulled himself together sharply. It was at this moment that Paula came into his line of vision and he saw that tears were running down her face. Dumbfounded, he dragged his gaze away, at the same time conquering the impulse to get up from the table. He realised that she did not know that she was crying, for she made no attempt to wipe her eyes, only stared down at the table, a faint smile twisting one corner of her mouth. His curiosity was aroused and he studied her closely. Somehow she looked out of place in there. Her clothes were beautiful and rather out of the ordinary. Her face, too, had something in it that was beyond mere beauty—" Paintable " was the description that occurred to him. A straight nose, a pointed face and an ivory complexion. He could not see her eyes because the heavy lids covered them. The lines of her mobile lips were emphasised by the scarlet lip-stick with which she had lightly touched them. He saw that a nerve was quivering at the

corner of her mouth. Her hands were beautiful, not large, but with rather long fingers. He guessed that her figure would be built on the same slim lines. Beneath her hat was a glimpse of bronze brown hair.

Bill was one of the people who are really sorry for the unhappiness of others. Some sensitive human beings guard themselves against this pain by building up a defence of hard cynicism—Bill had never done that because it seemed so useless—consequently, ever since he could remember, he had been the confidant of those who had found that life was like a game of ninepins, with themselves as the skittles. He had an almost childlike faith in the fundamental goodness of human nature. Sometimes he said, " I don't believe I've ever been let down by any one," and on the whole it was true. People who usually were not overburdened with scruples did try to behave decently to Bill. They made an exception of him, whatever their dealings were with the rest of their kind.

He remembered a friend saying, " You and Laura are the only couple I know who make marriage seem worth something. You justify it." And now this nightmare happening to him.

Suddenly, with a sense of horror, Paula realised she was weeping. She saw that the

young man opposite her was staring down into his coffee and she knew that he was embarrassed. She picked up her check which the waitress had left on the table and got up. She walked down the room. It was like one of those terrible dreams where you find yourself in the street with nothing on. The brown-clothed attendant standing near the cash desk stared at her curiously as she paid her bill. Then he held open the door for her. " 'Ad a tiff with 'er young man," he thought. " Gawd, love's pretty bloody. Plays 'avoc with your 'eart, that's wot love does."

Outside Paula dabbed her eyes. She was furious with herself for her lack of self-control. She crossed the Strand blindly, and in a moment found herself outside St. Martin's Church. " It would be dark in there," she thought, then, "No, I'm not religious, and I don't believe in a God, and I'm not going to pretend to myself that I do, just because I'm in this mess." Abruptly she boarded a number I 'bus that had drawn up by her. She went up the stairs to the top.

When Paula left the table at Lyons Bill had felt an overwhelming impulse to follow her. He thought, " She's desperate," and picking up the bill, he left his seat quickly, paid at the desk and went out. For a moment he lost her in the crowd, then he saw her crossing the road. He crossed too, and when

Paula got on the 'bus, he got on the same one. It rolled leisurely along the Strand till at Kingsway it turned to the right to go over Waterloo Bridge. At the Somerset House stop Paula got up and went down the stairs. Bill huried down too and followed her at a little distance. She walked slowly along the left side of the bridge, stopping every now and then to look over the parapet. The river was very still : the mirrored shafts of green, red and gold which the advertisement sky signs made in the water, were only broken into ripples as the breeze ran across the surface. Each time this happened the colours danced and shimmered, becoming inextricably mixed. A tram moved along the embankment and as it did so a reflected glittering snake slithered along in the water beside it.

Paula wondered about the people who lived in the crowded houses which lay black and sombre behind the wharves and factories on the water side. " Were there any them in the same desperate straits as herself ? " she thought. " Probably not one—for you'd have to be very abnormal to live as closely as they live to each other, and remain introspective. And only the abnormally introspective can loathe life as I do—hating life must mean an unhealthy mind." Her thoughts went off on another tangent. " It isn't the large sorrows that you can't bear, it's all the

mean petty unhappinesses that finish you. The big sorrows you can share with others. It's the little things that you're ashamed of that finish you. They eat up your defences of self-control so that when the big thing comes along you're ready to be smashed up." A string of barges drawn along by a tug slipped under the bridge. A million lights and shadows eddied in the wake of the procession. Paula thought, " God, it's so beautiful, and all I can do is to stand here and feel like Hell." Suddenly she leaned against the parapet of the bridge and moaned. " Damn!" she said under her breath. " You fool, pitying yourself again—Oh, Phil, Phil, I'm so afraid," and again a moan escaped her. Bill was standing quite near. He had seen her collapse against the wall and heard her expression of her mental agony. Abruptly he went up to her, cursing himself for an interfering ass. He said,

" Please don't—what's wrong ? It's awful to hear you make that sound."

Paula stood upright and looked at him. She said stiffly,

" I'm sorry."

" Look here, you're desperate enough to forgive me coming up to you like this. After all, we're both human beings—isn't that enough ? "

" You can't do anything to help, though

it was good of you to speak to me." Bill was determined not to leave her yet. He said.

" I was sitting at that table you were at in Lyons just now—saw that you were crying and I followed you. You looked so despairing."

" I am."

" It may make some little difference to you if I admit that so am I. Shouldn't have dared to interfere like this if I wasn't," he said. She remembered having seen him opposite her. She spoke in a more controlled voice.

" There's a certain sort of comfort in talking to someone. Shall we walk along a little way ? It's so cold standing here, the wind's blowing off the river." So he started to walk beside her. Because he couldn't bear the silence, he said,

" I'm also in frightful trouble and there's no way out." Paula answered,

" There's a way out so far as I'm concerned, and I'm going to take it." He knew what she meant.

" That's the only thing left for me to do too. I say, isn't it strange we should have come across each other like this ? Surely there can't be many people contemplating suicide to-night ; yet we both go to a Lyons and actually sit at the same table."

" I suppose it is queer, but everything

seems so to-night. Don't think I've been inside a Lyons for over five years. Wanted to go somewhere I'd be pretty sure of not seeing anyone I knew to-night."

" Didn't think you looked awfully like a Lyons patron." When they reached Stamford Street they turned again, and began to walk back towards the river.

" Is your unhappiness something that it will help to talk about ? " Paula said.

" Don't think so—anyway, I couldn't just yet. You know, I thought at first, when I saw you on the bridge, that you were going to die that way."

" Oh ! no, I can swim, so that wouldn't be any use. I know how I'm going to, though. Perhaps I'll tell you by and by if you'd like to know."

" I suppose we may as well keep together for a bit."

" Yes. Suppose we may as well. Where shall we go now, we can't go on walking backwards and forwards over the river all night."

" Well, where shall we go ? "

" I don't know," Paula said, " unless to the Café Royal."

" All right—I haven't been there for years —do you go often ? "

" Yes, a good bit."

When they reached the Strand, Paula hesitated. Bill said,

" Shall we go on walking or take a taxi ? "

" I think a taxi—I'm pretty tired."

He stopped an empty cab that was passing and told the man to go to the Café Royal—he opened the door for Paula to get in and as she did so a movement of her head reminded him of Laura. " How many times had he not followed her like this, filled with a sense of complete happiness. Was she still with Everard ? Laura and he had never quarrelled or got on each other's nerves. At least, not until lately, when he'd realised that she was going out rather a lot and that it had seemed quite difficult to get her alone for an evening. He hadn't minded her going out, only he had rather wished that she wasn't so tired when she came in. Once or twice she hadn't even seemed to want to talk when they were in bed. It wasn't that she had repulsed him in any way. How little you knew about people really! Were women like that ? Did their apparent love mean nothing ? Was it just a sort of kindness that made them respond to your caresses ? You didn't expect them to feel the same wild love that you felt, and you had to remember all the time not to be rough and hold yourself well in hand. But she had seemed to care a lot." It was because of that the shock had been so great. Bill could never understand how you could be in love with

more than one person at the same time—he knew it happened constantly amongst his own friends, but he simply didn't understand it. There flashed into his mind the memory of a day he and Laura had spent together in Surrey. Why should he remember it just now ? The common in Surrey had been at its loveliest. It was June and a heavy shower of rain had left little patches of soggy rich brown earth between the grass and heather. Their puppy had nearly gone off his head with excitement. And Laura, with her red hair flaming in the sunlight—she had looked like a slender tree in her vivid green dress.

" Do you feel that all this is really happening to you ? " Paula said.

" No, there's a dream-like quality about everything, isn't there ? "

" Yes." After a moment she continued : " Has it ever struck you that the experiences of human beings vary in quality rather than in actual happening ? After all there must be a definitely calculable number of things human beings can do, and in a life-time, alone or with someone else, they must do about ninety per cent. of the total."

" What were you thinking of exactly ? "

" Oh ! I don't know, you and me and everything. I suppose that as we're both young and desperately unhappy it's fairly

safe to assume we're also both in love. And if that's so, we've probably both gone through pretty much the same experiences in different degrees. Everybody is so much like everybody else and yet we go about as if our distress and feelings were unique."'

"Yes, I suppose so." After a silence she said.

" I may meet people at the Café Royal I know—will you mind talking to them ? We're almost there."

" Not a bit—it will give me time to think out things. By the way, my name's Bill Cheland."

" Mine's Paula Cranford. Afterwards perhaps we'll talk ? "

" Yes, afterwards let's talk."

The cab drew up at the entrance and the commissionnaire ran up to open the door. They got out and Bill paid the driver. Paula went inside to wait for him. When he joined her, he looked around curiously.

" I say, it looks all different from when I was here last."

" It's been rebuilt. They've got a huge organ upstairs. It came from America."

" Why an organ ? "

" Can't imagine—I suppose the management think that noise is good for trade."

" The decorations are pretty awful, aren't they ? "

" Frightful, unless it's one's particular taste."

" I'm an architect, so this kind of thing interests me particularly."

" O, Hell ! If I'd known that we'd have gone somewhere else—I'm so sorry. The café itself is even worse—it'll be too appalling for you." They went into the café. The atmosphere was like a slap of hot air from the Tube Railway. Bill said,

" God, what a fug ! "

" Pretty foul, but in a way I love this place."

" Do you really ? "

" Rather—where'll we sit ? " It was pretty crowded. Five people at a table on the left of the room began to wave at them. Further on a man got up and started to wave at Paula too. She took no notice of the five, but went on down the room towards him.

She said,

" Markham's quieter. The other table's full of whores and their what-nots. They seem rowdy if you're plunged amongst them for the first time. The girl who Markham's with is also one, but she's quiet and rather a nice creature."

When they reached the table, the man sitting at it got up and moved hats and coats to make room for them.

"Hello, Paula!" He was small and lean and hungry looking. A lovely girl with a crop of short red gold curls was sitting beside him.

" Hello, and how are you, Moira? " Paula said.

" Fine, Paula, and you ? "

" All right—I'd like you to know Bill—Bill, this is Moira, and that's Markham." Bill wondered if this was Markham whose play had made such a stir the year before. In fact, the playwright was his brother. Markham was rather a fine journalist, but he preferred to be known as a buffoon.

" What are we going to drink, Paula ? " Markham asked.

" I don't know."

" A bottle of 200 ? "

" It makes me so ill the next day if I drink too much. Burgundy, however good, is too heavy for me to get blind on. But never mind. Yes, 200 if you like." Markham became animated and efficient. He liked ordering things and people. He shouted :

" Henri ! " The waiter ignored him out of politeness. He knew his Markham, did Henri ; at the next shout he came up and took the order. Moira said suddenly,

" 200, oh ! God, you're a 200 fiend, Markham. Why not brandy ? "

" Hurrah ! she's awake again—second remark she's made this evening. The first

was when you came in—you're honoured—she always wakes up when there are women about."

"Bloody fool!" Moira muttered. Paula remarked quickly,

"Moira, did you hear about Pat Dollard and the party they gave on Wednesday? —Pat got tight in about an hour, and she rolled up to Don, Don's her husband," she explained for Bill, "and said, "You know this is definitely and absolutely the very best party I've been to for years, absolutely the very best.'"

"She's a piece is our Pat!" Markham said, and then,

"Did you hear about Edmund?"

"No, what?"

"Got chucked out of the Dragon and fought two policemen."

"Why?"

"Drunk."

"Well, that's nothing new."

"No, but he said he must have all the pictures on the walls upside-down. You know how many there are of old Dragon with children's outings and charabancs and things. Pretty bloody! Any way, he tried to put them upsidedown, and the barmaid as well; said he saw everything that way."

"He is a moron," Paula said.

"Poor old Edmund, it's chiefly that he

thinks he's got to original or cast into the outer darkness where he belongs."

" Markham, stop gassing and make Henri buck up, or I'm going." Moira sounded cross.

"All right, give him a chance. Don't forget they have to get the huge wine waiter and his huge keys before they can enter the huge cellar where the 200's kept, Moira. It's very precious. As you've probably had more of it inside your tummy than any other woman in London, you ought to know all about it."

" Bloody rot ! " She turned to Paula,

" Did I tell you about the way Flo behaved to me ? "

" No, what did she do ? "

" What did the fool do !—Why, she came to my place one night when I had that fellow Rollett staying, and insisted on coming in —said she must have a dress she left with me to keep for her. Twelve o'clock at night ! —Why, it wasn't decent."

" What happened ? "

" Oh ! Rollett got mad and told her to get out or he'd throw her out."

Bill felt a little uncomfortable because of Paula. Then he realised it was absurd to care—obviously she didn't.

" We've not spoken since. She cut me dead the last time I was in here and passed

her table. The dolt that she is—you'd have expected her to have had more sense. She's been at it for years even if she does pretend that she's a virgin—why, Henri told me the other night she wasn't a virgin by a thousand times—that's what Henri thinks."

"Was she tight when she came along that night?" Markham asked.

"Not she. Just as nosey as Hell. She must know everything."

Henri put the bottle down in front of Markham. Suddenly their attention was attracted to a table on the other side of the room where a row was in progress. It was occupied by a party of Americans. Two brawny commissionaires strode slowly towards them. After some persuasion the occupants were induced to leave, but not before one of them had smashed a glass and cut his hand, and another had taken off his coat and offered to fight any one or every one several times. Their leavetaking was much prolonged owing to a total inability to find out whose hat belonged to whom. They went at last, after much shaking of hands with the commissionaires and the waiters. The diversion caused by the scene had given Bill a chance to look round the place. He thought that the crowd was an amazingly mixed one. Half the people seemed ordinary enough, but there were some odd-looking

creatures amongst the rest—a few bore all the marks upon them of the human sewer rat, whilst here and there a face of extraordinary exotic beauty caught the eye.

Markham said, referring to the Americans,

" That's the kind of thing that makes me react to Streatham—yes, I'm all for Streatham—I shall look for rooms there tomorrow."

" You will," said Moira, " I can just see you doing it."

" Yes, I will—I want to be smug and respectable and take the dog out for a run before going to bed each night. I want to feel shocked like some of the people here now."

" You are shocked, my dear, so why worry ? " Paula said.

" Ah, I mean really shocked—shocked because it's wicked to be drunk and all that, not just because it's ugly."

" Well, go to Streatham and see how you like it," Moira said, " but meanwhile give me a drink."

" So sorry, O delicately nurtured Moira ! who waits so modestly to be asked by her Lord if she would like a sip of her Lord's wine."

" Markham, you're a damned fool and you bore me," Moira said, holding out her glass, " for Christ's sake give me a drink. "

" Well, if you put it like that I will," he filled her glass. After that he looked round the room, then exclaimed,

" Why, there's Dot and the two Rathbones and Hudson—they haven't been here for ages. Wave to them, Paula, and maybe they'll see us."

" No, you go and get them." So he got up and went across the room. As soon as he'd gone Moira said to Bill,

" A penny for your thoughts." It was one of her gambits which she used on every newcomer. Paula knew it well. It was successful in a surprising number of cases.

Bill smiled,

" Sorry I was a blank." He propped his elbows on the table and took a good look at her. He thought,

" Not like the whores of my youth—more intelligent. Of course, during the war it was only the stupid girls who were whores, as a rule—besides, intelligence wasn't the strong suit of most of the men in the army either. This girl is really lovely." He slewed round to look at Paula—she had taken off her hat. He thought, " Yes, you're beautiful too. I wonder if you're virtuous—probably. They seem a queer crowd—rather frightful." The burgundy had already dulled his suffering—it would come back again later when he had had some more. He did not

know how potent No. 200 was. Markham always said about it, " It's cost me pounds —not at the time, but because of it— afterwards—it's an aphrodisiac of the most fatal kind." Now Markham came back with some of the Crowd. They were all in various stages of drunkenness. Paula hoped Bill would not be horrified. Henri saw them and came hurriying. They all squashed in at the table somehow and more 200 was ordered.

Jane Rathbone spoke in a high distinct voice. She emphasised every third word she said, which gave all her sentences a curious rhythmic quality. A lot of the Crowd spoke like that. They saw so much of each other, it was hard not to catch habits of speech.

She said,

" Now for God's sake tell us what's been happening—we only got back from the country yesterday, where we've been having a booze—we were camping out—we met a perfectly lovely tramp, who went and fetched bottles of whisky for us each day. He stayed with us. He nearly cried when we came back home after Rath got so blind he almost drowned himself by falling into the river." Jane Rathbone looked decadent. And she was. Bill hated her at once. The top part of her face was good, but she had an ugly mouth.

Markham was standing up. He never sat still for long. He had caught sight of some more of the Crowd.

" Why, there's Matthews over there—what a Nancy he looks ! and that bitch Jean."

" She's not a bitch particularly," Hudson said lazily, " but I wish she wouldn't look at every man she talks to as if she wanted to go off on a honeymoon with him right away. She's a perfect crescendo of love."

" Drink, more drink," Rathbone shouted.

" Oh ! shut up," Jane said, " why must you always shout when you're tight ? "

Matthews and the girl Jean saw them and came along. They got seats at the next table. Jean leaned across Matthews to Paula,

" Why didn't you turn up at the Dollard's party ? " she said.

" I had to go out to a dinner and had an awful headache, so I went straight home afterwards."

" What a pity. I wish you'd been there, Paula. It was a damned good party. A lot of new people turned up. I sat out with a beautiful young man. He tried to put his hand under my skirt, but I told him I didn't want him to. He said, 'What a pity, because I'd like to most awfully—just once, you know—but you are evidently a strong and pure woman.' "

" I hope you gave him a mouthful of blood or a thick ear," Paula said.

" No, why should I ? He was a very beautiful young man. I explained that I was neither strong nor pure, but that I just didn't want him to do it."

" You aren't a bitch, are you, Jean ? " Hudson asked.

A tall man came towards them. He had no hat and wore a bright blue shirt. In his eyes was the bland cod-fish expression of the very drunk.

Jean saw him.

" Christ ! here's David sozzled as usual."

" Not sozzled—sozzled yourself—absolutely sober, " he said—" nice thing calling rich man like me sozzled." He stood next to Bill, swaying slightly on his feet.

" Make room for rich man," he said.

Someone brought a chair and he sat down hurriedly by Bill.

Moira shouted to him,

" What's the trouble, David ? "

" Not trouble—rich man won quid on horse to-day. Order everybody drink my expense."

" No, you don't, David," Markham said, " we've had some of that before. You order drinks and then never have enough to pay for them."

David forgot what he had said and turned to Bill :

" Man's best friend's digestion. Prove it to you. Listen," he bent towards him so that he half overbalanced. Paula grabbed at his arm.

" Sit up, David, you are blotto. You'll frighten the young man if you upset into his lap."

David straightened himself up and leant his elbows on the table for support.

" Beastly ship rocks so," he said. Paula laughed and turned to listen to what Markham was saying. David went on,

" Man's best friend's digestion. Listen—supposing I'm in theatre and want drink—in interval—nine times out of ten bloody person I'm with says ' Had enough—don't want any more. Sit still.' So—have to go alone if it wasn't for digestion. Digestion comes along—when I drink, digestion drinks too—when I've had enough, so's digestion. See what I mean ? " Bill nodded.

" Best friend—only let me down twice. Then more my fault than his. Digestion's not strong as me. Poor old best friend ! " He rested his head on his arms and slept.

" Look, David's passed out," Jean said.

" Wonder where his bloody paramour's got to," Hudson drawled; " oughtn't to let him off his leash. Mean's *I'll* have to see him home. They're a pretty couple."

" The blind leading the blind you'll be, Huddy, seeing him home," Jean said.

Under cover of the general talk and laughter Paula leaned across the sleeping David and said to Bill,

" Do they seem too frightful ? "

" A bit grim, some of them, aren't they ? "

" Well, they're all what I call the damned —not Moira perhaps, but the rest are." She spoke very softly so that the others should not hear. " They don't know it, but they are—most of them are fairly intelligent, some really clever, but the whole Crowd are damned, because they either know what want and can't get it, or don't know what they want, but know it's something. They drink because their nerves are rotten, and their nerves get worse because they drink."

" Why don't they work a bit ? They'd have less time for drink and rotten nerves."

" But they do work—and a lot of the women even have a child or two. If the child's boarded out it generally means that the woman has a job. All the men work. Yet they hardly sleep at all and are like this as a result. It isn't often one meets anyone seeing them as you are for the first time. How do they strike you ? "

" They all look pretty unhealthy. That's the first thing that I noticed."

" They are. It's this stupid life, and London. Being sensitive people, they've had to cover it up somehow. Most of them

are a little unbalanced. The Crowd are held together by sheer boredom. They run away from themselves into this. We hate each other, but we can't stay away."

" I don't understand." Paula felt she could not bear the place another second.

" Let's get out of it. I've had enough."

Moira heard her last words and said :

" Where are you going, Paula ?—The Haunt ? "

" Don't think so. Not to-night."

" Oh ! do come on to the Haunt." Jane's nervy face twitched as she spoke.

" They're doing a new show to-night. Tom said it was good and as bawdy as hell."

" No, I don't want to—though there isn't anywhere else better to go as late as this."

Hudson was very tight—he said,

" God, it's all bloody ! Always the same thing—the Red Lion, the Café, the Haunt, home, copulation, sleep, the Red Lion, the café, the Haunt, home, copulation, sleep. It's the hell of a lovely life ! "

" And work by day," Jane sneered.

" Don't forget work by day, Hudson. We're not all millionaires like Paula." Markham said to Rathbone,

" Can't you tell Jane to shut up ? She's unbearable sometimes."

" No, I can't—she takes no notice of me, and any way she doesn't mean it."

" Would you like to go to the Haunt ? It's a small cabaret place—it's quite good—has an atmosphere of its own. It opens late—you can dance there, and they do a show every night," Paula explained.

Bill didn't care where they went, so he said,

" I don't mind. But are my clothes all right ? " The Crowd shouted with laughter.

" Oh, you can go in nothing if you like," Markham said, and began an obscene limerick that everybody had heard him recite till they were tired of it. Two whores at a table near by looked shocked. They hated the Crowd because they could not understand it. You never knew who was who in it.

" Disgraceful," they told each other—

" Didn't ought to be allowed, it didn't. "

" What's the time ? " Rathbone inquired.

" Nearly eleven o'clock, " Markham answered.

" Then it means sandwiches if we want more drink. That half-wit Henri hasn't been for orders for ages. He's done it on purpose. Why the hell should I eat sandwiches because I want a drink—what a bloody country it is ! "

" Oh ! shut up, Rath."

" Always grousing, about the country ; why not get out of it ? " Jane shrilled.

Paula rose.

" I'm off."

" Wait a few minutes—I'm going to order some food and have more 200."

" No thanks, Markham—how much do I owe you ? Here's a pound, I haven't any change." Bill began to get out his pocket book.

" Oh, let's leave that till later," she said.

They left the table and walked out of the café into Regent Street. The air outside seemed fresh and sweet. By the glare of a light from a jeweller's shop Bill saw Paula's face. He was frightened at her drawn expression. He glanced away, then slipped his hand through her arm. She shivered and dragged her mind back to Bill.

" We must decide where we're going. The Haunt will be ghastly because of the noise," she said.

" I don't know anywhere to suggest."

" I know a place quite near here. You can get drinks there all night. I'm not a member, but it's quite easy if you've been there before. It's quiet."

" All right."

They walked along Shaftesbury Avenue. The theatre crowds had just poured out into the streets. The road was jammed with cars, which crawled along, stopping every now and then to let the cross traffic through. In a taxi Paula saw a man with a woman in

his arms. He was pressing his lips fiercely to hers.

Paula said quickly,

" Let's cross over here—we can slip down Wardour Street and miss the worst of the crowd."

When they reached Newport Court they turned down a narrow passage. Paula stopped at a shabby looking house and knocked at the door. It was opened by a wizened little man, who, after he had peered at her, said " Good evening, Madam," and led the way downstairs. The place consisted of two small rooms. In one there was a bar. In the other various diddler machines. They went into this room. It was empty except for a small dusty kitten which was sitting in front of a gas fire. Paula picked it up and sat down at one of the tables.

Bill said,

" What will you have ? "

" I don't know—absinthe, I think—it's quite good here."

He ordered her an absinthe, and a whisky for himself. When the drink had been brought the waiter left the room. Paula stroked the kitten.

" This is an odd place. They only charge you ordinary pub prices and you can get drinks any time," she said.

" Who uses it ? "

" Waiters mostly."

" Why don't the police raid it ? "

" I don't know. One night I was in here and two policemen came in. The girl in the bar asked them what they wanted to drink. They had some beer, paid for it, and left when they'd drunk it. I've thought once or twice that it's used by burglars as well as waiters, which may be why it's left alone. It must make life much more simple for the policeman if he knows where he can find his burglar when he wants him. I met one in here once. He was rather a nice creature. The others called him Jimmy. He wore a bowler hat and was most polite. He pulled out his pocket what looked like quite a perfectly good ring, and offered it to me for twenty shillings. I believe the stones were real. I thought he must have stolen it from somewhere."

Two men came into the room and began to put shillings in one of the diddler machines. Once, one of them won and got eighteen shillings back. He put this all in again until he had lost it. Then he went out with his friend. Paula and Bill finished their drinks and ordered more.

By and by Bill said,

" I hated that Jane Rathbone woman."

" Oh ! did you ? She's not such a bad sort when you know her. She just drinks

because she's unsatisfied. After all, how could Rath satisfy anyone ? "

" Why doesn't she leave him, then ? "

" Why should she ? Besides, she's sorry for him and he depends on her. What I can't see is why she married him originally. They're both frightfully promiscuous and she likes men and women equally well."

Bill felt a little sick.

" I must be an awful prig, but you know, Paula, they sound pretty beastly to me."

" They are, my dear, until you know them. It's all a question of degree and what your values are, isn't it ? They bore me horribly most of the time and yet they've become a habit."

" Where are we going after this ? " Bill asked.

She thought a moment. It was a risk, but she felt certain that Bill was all right, so she said,

" Would you care to come back to my flat ?—It'll be easier to talk there than anywhere else."

" I'd like to."

" Let's walk then—it's not far. I live just off Grays Inn Road. I don't want to be alone, do you ? "

" No." He thought, " She's nearly at the end of her tether. I'm glad I'm with her. Oh ! Laura, Laura ! "

Twenty minutes later he was following Paula into her flat. She went straight into the sitting-room and switched on the lights. Bill saw that it was a good room. It was long and rather narrow. The walls were panelled and painted green. The blue curtains held in their design a touch of flame. Paula threw her hat and coat down. She lit the gas fire. Then she pulled an armchair up and said,

"Sit here, you'll find cigarettes in the box on the mantelpiece."

He sat down and watched her cross the room to get glasses and bottles from a cupboard. He had been right then about her figure—it was lovely. She left the room to fetch soda water and he heard her moving about in the next one. The chair he was sitting in was very comfortable. There were a number of shelves in the room filled with books. The mirror on the wall opposite him reflected a small statue—a slender Eros cast in aluminium. There were lots of flowers about the room.

He thought,

"She must be well off." Oh, well, she didn't matter—what mattered was Laura and Everard and himself.

Suddenly his thoughts went whirling off. He thought about his dead brother John.

"If John had been alive, somehow it

would have been all right. How jolly it had been long ago in the Rectory garden. The trees and flowers had never seemed quite so good anywhere since. In April, when the buds almost cracked as you watched them and the yellow crocuses speared their way through the lawn. That day when the ducks had waddled clumsily in from the pond outside. How John had laughed when Tiger leaped upon them barking and sent them waddling laboriously out again—John, short and grubby, with bare knees and ruffled golden hair. How queer that that day should remain so vividly in your mind. God, how blue the sky had been—John had snuffed up the air and declared he could smell the sunshine. Then that day at school, when John had been thrashed for breaking bounds—he had been seen coming out of a pub in the next village. That had been rather bloody. The Head had rebuked him in front of the whole school. You'd wanted to blub because you knew from the stiff set look on his face what he was feeling like. After he'd been whacked you'd gone for a walk with him—and when deep in the wood and quite safely hidden, you had put your arm round his neck and given him a hug ; and he hadn't minded. You'd both blubbered a bit and felt better. Then that ghastly day in the war, coming back from

the line for a rest. John was a bit of a devil in some ways and got the stiff jobs to do. Even if he wasn't a strict disciplinarian he was pretty successful at getting things done by the men that they wouldn't do for everyone. He just didn't care about discipline. It had made the O. C. mad with him sometimes. He hated wearing a Sam Brown, but had not been able to explain why. That day, coming back, he had ducked as a shell that wasn't really very near, screamed through the air. How the fellows next him had laughed at Cheland, pretending he was afraid. It happened twice and then you'd felt ghastly because you'd seen his expression. It was a look as if he was contemplating something inside himself and finding what he saw horrible. You knew what it meant—suddenly he had begun to swear— 'Damn you, you bloody fools! I'm not ducking for fun, I damned well can't help it!' He had lost his control at that and begun to whimper and crawl on his hands and knees—God! it had been awful—it was shell-shock all right—he'd never got over it. In the end, when he died, it had seemed the best solution to his life—you'd never felt his death with this desolating personal sense of loss till now, when you needed him." Bill sat with his head between his hands.

Paula found him like that when she came

back into the room. She did not quite know what to do—so she put the syphon she had brought in on the table with the rest of the bottles and glasses. She poured herself out a brandy. After a moment she said,

" Have a drink, Bill ? " He straightened up and said,

" Yes, please."

" What'll you have ? There's whisky, brandy, gin and lemon squash and soda water. Perhaps you'd better come and take your own. "

He got up from the chair. Paula carried her drink over to the divan by the fire. On the way she stopped to glance at herself in the mirror. She thought that she looked pretty plain. Bill took some whisky and squirted soda into it. The syphon worked badly, so he shook it—it worked better then. Paula sat down and held her glass between her hands to warm the brandy. She said,

" Tell me about it."

He came and sat down next to her.

" Shall I ? "

" Please."

He held his glass so that the firelight shone through the liquid. It was gold and full of silver bubbles. He took a long drink, then leaned back and crossed his legs. Paula sipped her brandy. She did not look at him.

" Well," he began, " it's about Laura, she's my wife. I went home early this evening. She thought I wasn't coming back till late. I found I'd left some papers I'd got to show to the man I was dining with, so I had to go home and fetch them. I used my latchkey as I always do. Nellie, that's our maid, was out. I went upstairs and found Laura with Everard. He's a very old friend of mine. She was lying on our bed with him. They hadn't even bothered to close the door. They didn't hear me—I came away and walked to that Lyons place where you were." He finished the drink in his glass.

Paula said,

" Take another drink."

He rose and went over to the table and poured himself out some more whisky.

" So you think she's unfaithful to you."

" She was being unfaithful when I went into the room—God damn them ! "

He put the glass down and clutched his head in his hands. He began to breathe quickly with a hissing sound. Paula kept quite still he had stopped, then she said,

" It doesn't necessarily follow she's not in love with you still—I know how bloody it must have been to find it out like that, but are you sure she doesn't still care for you ? She hasn't said she doesn't, has she ? "

" No."

" Well, your'e lucky. Don't chuck love away lightly."

" But you don't understand—I expect I didn't make it quite clear—I saw them, you see. She had no clothes on."

Bill picked up his glass and came and sat down again by Paula. She didn't want him to go on thinking about his wife being naked in the other man's embrace, so she said,

" Tell me more about her."

" Well, there's not much to tell really—she's seven years younger than me. I'm thirty-four—we were married six years ago. This business seems so incredible—she is such a decent sort of person. We met at the tennis club. She plays an awfully good game. We were drawn as partners in the mixed doubles. That's how I first came to know her. She's pretty beautiful to look at—red hair and green-brown eyes. She didn't know much about life when we got married. Her mother's a silly, prudish woman. Didn't tell her anything—we might have messed things up badly because I wasn't very experienced myself. I'd only had one or two other women before, when I was in the army. I wasn't frantically keen about that sort of thing then. I only went during the war because I was afraid, may be, therewas something wrong with

me, as I hadn't even wanted to, like most of the fellows I knew. Then I met Laura. Of course, I didn't think of anyone else afterwards that way. I love her frightfully. I can't bear this. Thinking of her and that swine. I keep seeing them—it's absolutely finished me. I've been over-working lately. Perhaps that's why the shock has knocked me out. My partner's been ill, so I've been doing his work as well." He drank some more of his whisky and soda.

"Don't you think you're seeing the whole thing out of proportion? She may be just temporarily infatuated with this man. It does happen, you know. It doesn't necessarily mean the end of the world because a woman has intercourse with a man who's not her husband."

Bill turned round to stare at her. She was surprised at his expression of amazement and horror.

"But you don't understand—how could any decent man who's in love with his wife bear the thought of her being unfaithful to him?"

Paula finished her brandy. She twirled the stem round and round between her fingers.

"Oh! well, lots of decent men have borne the thought. Perhaps because, ultimately, they've found they came first."

" I simply don't know what you mean. I think promiscuity's pretty foul. If two people marry it seems to me that they ought to be faithful to one another, unless they stop caring—that's different."

" But human nature isn't made like that."

" Well, it ought to try to be. Now I know Laura's got someone else I know she doesn't want me—so I'll leave it clear for her."

" Oh ! but it's childish—you can't mess up both your lives just because of an indiscretion on her part."

" An indiscretion ! You don't know Laura. She must love Everard pretty deeply to be unfaithful to me. As a matter of fact, she knew him before she knew me. I suppose she's been in love with him all this time. It isn't an easy thing with Laura—she's a decent normal person." He was shocked at Paula's attitude, as she was aware.

" It's no use talking—I'm afraid we see the whole thing differently. You're unmarried, aren't you? " he said.

" Yes."

" Well, then you can't judge what a married person feels over a thing of this sort."

Paula got up and went over to the table to get herself another drink. She thought,

" I wonder why I'm bothering with anyone whose attitude is quite so infantile as this? "

Bill thought,

" She's looking at the matter as if she was a fast woman. It's queer because I'm sure she's not."

" Now that I've told you about it, what about you? " he said.

Paula came back and sat down again. She leaned forward a little so that he could not see her face.

" Mine's more simple than yours—I've lived with a man for a year. Now he's met someone else he wants to marry. At least, she means him to marry her—so he's broken with me—he told me to-night."

" The swine ! "

" Oh, no, he's quite a civilised human being. He doesn't believe in going on with an affair that's ceased to be mutual."

" You care about him a lot? "

" Yes, a lot—he was the first in that way, you see. I care too much to go on without him, anyway." Her voice was quite steady. They were both silent for a little while.

" What's the time? " she asked.

" A quarter to one."

" Would you like to come for an hour to the Haunt? "

" If you like, but oughtn't I to think about finding somewhere for the night before it gets any later? "

" Why bother? You can stay here—it doesn't matter to me."

" Would you like me to? " He looked into her face frankly.

" You know I would rather—I've all sorts of things to clear up and decide, and I'm afraid of going to pieces if I'me alone."

" Then I'll stay." He was worried. He thought, " Shouldn't I try to explain that the trouble she's in will pass with t'me. After all, she isn't married to the swine. But would she see it in her present desperate mood? Probably not, but any way, I ought to try and put it to her." So he said,

" Look here, I expect you'll tell me to go to hell, but you know your unhappiness will pass in time. It does, that sort of hurt. Can't you hang on for a bit? "

" I know all that. It would pass in time —probably in less than a year I'd be in love with someone else. What you don't know is that this is the excuse I've been waiting for to get out of it all. Oh ! I know I'm decadent and morbid. Living hasn't ever seemed worth while, and this has simply clinched my desire to die. Even when I was at the best part with Phil, in the beginning I wasn't very happy for more than a little while now and again. I mean I still got tight and that sort of thing. You see it's the uselessness of it all. Why go on mucking up

a world that a lot of people seem to find good? "

" Oh, I say, you mustn't think awful things like that. Perhaps it's because you're not leading a healthy life—I mean, no home life or children. A woman's in a rotten false position if she lives with a man she isn't married to, I always think. Of course, I don't know anything about your existence really, but from what you've said and the friends of yours I've seen, it might have something to do with it."

Paula wondered if it was humanly possible to make him see her point of view.

" No, all that doesn't make any difference. You see, I'm so bored, horribly bored nearly all the time—I wouldn't bring children into this bloody world for anything—I'd think it pretty low to give a child the sort of neurotic parent I'd be. Now and again one gets scraps of happiness, but they only last a few minutes. And those moments get rarer as you grow older. I mean real happiness, not just new sensations. The kind that flashes over you for all sorts of little reasons—a puppy rolling about in the sunshine, or hearing a thrush in a garden on a June evening—oh ! you know what I mean. But how does that ecstasy help you all the other days? "

She got up and took a cigarette from a box

on the mantelpiece. She handed the box to Bill. When they had lit up, he said,

" You sound as if you expect too much."

Paula still stood by the mantelpiece.

" You can't expect too much. Life ought to be wonderful. People ought to be happy. If only we could understand how to get into harmony with things! I believe in the future here—I believe in a beautiful world—I believe that one day human beings will be perfect. But this generation's children won't see it—oh, hell! It will probably take generations to reach that state—but I believe that it will come, and the only decent thing a person like me can do is to be negative—I can't fit in—I suppose I was born bored, or may be it was the war. It threw our generation out. Things were so hectic and unreal just when we were arriving at adolescence. Haven't you seen how the pre-war values have changed utterly?—We seem to have lost our moral sense. My own brothers are a good example of what I'm saying. I had four. Decent ordinary boys when the war came. They were all in it, and now the two who are still alive are just wasters—not really bad, but slipshod and weak. They live for to-day alone—to-morrow they may be dead—if not, they'll muddle through that day too, because the next may never come. Isn't that

the direct outcome of the war psychology? "

" It's all rather new to me. I haven't ever thought about it. It may be true," Bill said.

She put her hand on his arm,

" The next generation won't be much better because they, too, won't have got far enough away from that hectic time—but may be the next will have, unless some morons go and make another war." Her face looked wistful. " I'd like to have seen that new generation."

Bill had risen, and instinctively he put an arm round her shoulders. She stayed like that for a moment, then moved away. She picked up the empty glasses from the floor, and walked over to the table with them.

" We'd better get along to the Haunt if we're going. It shuts about three," she said.

. . . .

When they got outside they found it was raining. They walked in silence for a while.

" You've decided definitely to commit suicide? " Bill asked presently.

" Yes, quite definitely."

" You've got some idea about how, I suppose? "

" Yes. To-morrow afternoon I shall motor down to Sussex. There is a cliff there, one of

the Seven Sisters. I shall drink a lot of brandy and then drive the car over the edge. It's over seven hundred feet high at that point, so there's no danger of a fiasco. It seems to me a sure and pretty clean method. If you want to come too you can, but I think you're making a mistake to contemplate it at all."

" It seems a damned good way to do it." Again they walked in silence.

" We turn here," Paula said, and went down a small unlit alley off Tottenham Court Road.

" What's it going to be like? " he asked doubtfully. It was a pretty slummy looking passage.

" Oh, just the ordinary kind of thing you find open at this time of night—only they don't sell drink. Most of the people get well oiled before they arrive—they'll have sobered up a bit by now. Except the ones who live near enough to go back to their own places for more."

She stopped in front of a small door and pushed a bell. After a moment a very stout man opened it.

" Ah, hullo ! Paula, it's you, is it? "

" I expect you're right. I've a friend with me I want to sign in."

The fat man stood back for them to pass. She led the way up some dark stairs. There

was a seat in an alcove on the half-way landing. A light covered by a Chinese lantern shed a faint glow inside. A woman was sitting on a man's lap in the seat, half hidden by a curtain. He had pushed his hand down between her dress and her shoulder and was caressing her. She was smiling rather stupidly and hardly seemed to notice what was happening. Bill thought that the man was getting more kick out of it, by the expression on his face. Paula passed them as if they did not exist.

" It's only Kitty," she said. She disliked her as a type. " She's always more or less tight, and she's the most promiscuous woman in Bloomsbury. There can't be more than a dozen men in all the crowd who haven't slept with her some time."

At the top of the stairs they came to a small room on the right. Paula said,

" We leave our coats here."

She went over to a mirror which was hanging crookedly on the wall and powdered her face. Bill hung up his hat and coat on a vacant peg and wondered why the hell he had come. When Paula was ready, they went into the dance room. It was long and narrow and painted pink and yellow. Not more than twenty people were present. Nearly all of them looked bored. At one end a young man was playing a fox trot on a piano. Two

others accompanied him—one with a drum and the other on a saxophone. Only four couples were dancing. Bill recognised two of them as people he had seen at the Café Royal.

Markham was there ; he came across the room when he saw Paula,

" So you've come after all—thank God—this place is lousy to-night."

" Anybody been here? "

" The Chandlers were in—they left about half-an-hour ago. I think they've been having a row—she looked as done up as hell. I can't think why all you women rave about her."

" She's frightfully attractive."

" Attractive, pish ! Burnt out ! "

At one end of the room there was a sandwich counter. The small fat man who had opened the door was serving coffee and food to half a dozen people. A strong smell of kippers pervaded the air. Bill and Paula strolled towards the group. When they came up they heard Rathbone saying,

" Some damn fool of a man gave it to Jane before we were married. She was away and I was getting depressed at having no money at all. So I went to her desk in the hope that she'd left something pawnable there. We'd had a row, therefore I wasn't feeling too scrupulous. In one of the drawers I

found several jewel cases. Rich plushy affairs you know. In one of them was a gorgeous brooch with diamonds and what-nots round it. I dashed in a taxi to Attenborough's. When I got there, in the compartment next to the one I'd been shown into, a man was selling sheets. They gave him fifteen pounds for them, fifteen pounds for a lot of ruddy sheets. I watched them counting out the notes. God, it made me sick!—Anyway, I thought they'd sit up when they saw my diamonds. The other fellow went out and the assistant came to me. I opened the case, sort of carelessly, because I was a bit windy he'd think I'd stolen the blood-stained thing. I asked him what he could let me have on it. He picked it up and said, "Sorry, sir, we don't want it—it's not gold, and the rest is only stone." God! I was mad." He told the story rather well and raised a laugh.

"Served you right, Rath, you damned thief," Jane said.

"What happened to Moira, Markham?" Paula asked.

"The banker fellow came in—she went off with him—Moira's a bitch—she drinks like a fish at my expense, and then calmly leaves me when someone else turns up."

"Rot! She's merely making her living—what good are you to her, anyhow—you

take up her time and probably lose her good custom. I think you get damn good value for your money."

" What rubbish you talk sometimes, Paula. It's a flaw in an otherwise perfect character."

The band, which had been languishing for the past ten minutes, woke up again. Paula turned to Bill.

" Shall we dance? " he said.

She nodded, and he put his arms round her. Markham watched them a moment, then he smiled a little maliciously.

" Off with the old and on with the new, and damn quickly too," he thought. Philip's very latest affair had not escaped his sharp eyes. He had kept his mouth shut though, for a change. He knew that Paula had been sozzling brandy lately because she was unhappy, and he guessed that Philip's new affair was the cause. He went over to the window and looked out. The view was one of back yards. In the darkness they ceased to be hideous. The wet shining roofs of the houses presented a crazy series of planes. Standing with his back to the room, the mask slipped for a moment from his face—he looked as he felt, tired and unhappy. He wished he could help Paula. " How long had he been in love with her? Nearly three years· There hadn't ever been a chance for him, so

he'd kept quiet about it. Paula, so far as he knew, didn't know that he cared for her like that. All the other women he'd had since were simply to make him forget his hunger for her. How alike they had been ! All women were, come to that. Here and there was one with more experience, or one who took more trouble to excite you. That was all. He was tired of it." He thought, " What's wrong with us? All sex-mad—sex, sex, sex. What's wrong with us? Some obscure urge that drives us about and won't let us rest—what's it all about any way? " No answer came to his mind. He dropped the curtain and turned again to the room. Paula and Bill were still dancing. She had her eyes closed and drifted round as if in a trance. " She looks as happy as hell. My God, she does ! A leaf blown in the wind," thought Markham, and then, " Bloody sentimentalist, she's the same as the rest, but I love her—she'd give me peace."

By now, nearly all the couples were sitting about the room embracing. Rathbone was what Hudson called " dry cleaning " a large good-looking girl whose name was Letty. She was the Haunt whore. Jane Rathbone from the other side of the room was watching her husband with eyes that were fierce with jealousy. She hated him to be promiscuous, and yet she was completely so herself.

Markham felt disgusted, suddenly, and for the time being he hated the place. He went off to the cloak room to get his hat and coat. Paula danced slowly by him on his way out. Her eyes opened and she smiled at him.

" Going, Markham ? "

" Yes, I'm fed up with the Crowd to-night. Had about as much of them as I can stomach. Not you, of course."

" Thanks. Good-night, my dear."

" Good-night."

When he had gone Paula said to Bill :

" He's a decent creature. Poor old Markham ! He's hardly a real person somehow. At times I've thought a specially violent gust of wind may blow and he'll just disappear. He seems to become more shadow-like each year."

They went to the sandwich bar to get some lemonade. Jane was there with several people gathered round her—when they came up she said :

" I say, do you know Craddock the painter ? And Tom Mulberry ; when he's sober he writes those nasty unsigned novel reviews in *The Times Literary Supplement*. And this is Cecilia who runs the book shop."

Cecilia was a tall dark-haired girl with carmine lips.

" Where have we met before ? " she said to Craddock.

" It was in your shop. You were blind."

" I'm sure I wasn't in the shop."

" Yes you were, Cecilia," Jane said—she loved interrupting. " He came in to ask for a book he thought was twenty shillings—and you told him it was five pounds. He bought a one and sixpenny pamplet on birth control instead."

" It can't have been there—must have been one day when I was away and you swine came and made the shop into a drinking den. Things have come to a pretty pass when I'm told I've met people in my own shop and I'm certain I haven't," Cecilia drawled.

" Well, perhaps it was somewhere else, but we've met any way," he insisted.

" Ah ! that's better."

" You look pretty washed out, Paula," Jane said—she was feeling malicious.

" Do I ? "

" Yes. Perhaps you've been boozing too much lately."

" Perhaps I have."

" I wish to God I could now," Craddock said.

" I could make good use of a bucketful," Mulberry said.

" You could certainly have done with a bucket an hour ago when you threw up," Jane remarked.

" Think perhaps I'll turn myself inside out and just swim home," Mulberry went on as if he had not heard her. " New scientific discovery on the uses of beer, man his own container, land or water animal. How's that ? "

Paula and Bill moved away.

" Shall we have one more dance and then go, or shall we go now ? " she said.

" Just as you like—but you do look pretty done."

" Done, hell, I should think I am ! Let's go now."

So they went out to the cloak room. When they were ready, Paula said,

" It's nearly three, isn't it ?—the clock here's always fast, and it says a quarter past." He looked at his watch—it was five minutes after three. She said, " God, I am tired ! "

They stumbled down the stairs. The door leading into the street stuck, and they had to call the fat man to open it. Outside a wet wind blew against their faces. This time Paula took Bill's arm herself. A taxi honked mournfully ,as it crossed from a side street. Bill whistled and it drew up beside them. He opened the door for Paula to get in.

" What's the address ? " he asked.

" Thirteen, Black's Court. First turning out of Gray's Inn Road after the police station."

Bill repeated this to the driver,who grunted and pulled down his flag. He got in and slammed the door. Every bone in his body ached with fatigue. He leaned back, then took a cigarette out of his case and lit it. He saw that Paula's eyes were closed—she looked corpse-like in her stillness. His mind played him a trick and he wondered why he was there. Then he remembered. They didn't speak until the cab slowed down.

" Here we are," Paula said.

He opened the door and got out, and then helped Paula to alight. By the time he had paid the taxi man she had opened the front door. She went up the stairs wearily. A black cat rushed down past them. It made Bill start. Paula's flat was on the third floor. When she had opened the door she went into the sitting-room and switched on the light.

" Have a drink ? " she said.

" No thanks, I've had enough."

She lit the gas fire and crouched over it. He stood near her looking down. She made him feel pitiful. Presently she got up and looked very straightly into his eyes.

" I think I can trust you absolutely " she said.

" You can, although I can't see why you should."

" Although somehow it doesn't seem to matter frightfully any more," she added.

" I understand. But any way, I am all right."

She went into her bedroom which led out of the room they were in. He heard her opening a drawer. He stood where she had left him by the fire place. He finished smoking his cigarette and threw the stub into the grate. The tiny bronze figure of a Buddha on the mantelpiece attracted his attention. He picked it up and examined it carefully. Presently Paula came back into the room. She was carriyng a pair of yellow silk pyjamas.

" Will you wear these ? I think they'll fit all right. I'm going to get undressed now. You'll find the bath-room next to this room, on your left. When I'm in bed I'll call you. Is that all right ? "

He wondered if he could suggest that he should sleep on the divan, but felt a certain delicacy about doing so.

" You're sure you don't mind having me for the night ? " he said.

" Quite sure," and she turned away to go into the bedroom.

Bill went off to the bath-room. It was a good bath-room. The walls were tiled with pale green. The bath was white porcelain. There were all the washing gadgets you could possibly want . He thought,

" I wonder how I'll be able to shave to-mor-

row." He took his clothes off. When he was naked he looked at his reflection in the mirror. He thought, " I'm a better shape than Everard." Hastily he put on the yellow pyjamas. " I'd like to see this fellow of hers." He turned on the tap of the wash basin.

" She's a queer creature. Supposing I was really a beast. What a risk she's running. She's beautiful too. But I suppose what she said was true ; she doesn't care a damn what happens now. But any way, I don't believe a woman's ever raped unless she wants to be." That made him wince suddenly because of Laura. He saw a new tooth brush in a shining glacine envelope and he stripped the covering and brushed his teeth violently. It made him feel better.

When he was ready he switched off the light and went back to the sitting-room. He examined the book shelf and read some of the titles. There was no kind of order about their arrangement. James Joyce, Conrad, The Week-End Book, Edna St. Vincent Millay, H. G. Wells, Freud, and Liam O'Flaherty were all together, besides a host of other names, of which he had never heard. He found a copy of Lawrence's *Revolt in the Desert* and took it over to the fire to look at. Presently Paula called to him that she was ready. He put the book back in the shelf and went into the other room.

" Shall I put the lights out in there ? " he asked.

" Please, and also the fire. The tap is on the right-hand side. And then if you don't mind, could you pull the curtains in here and open the window ? " She sounded faintly self-conscious.

When he came back he looked at her for a moment. He thought her very lovely. She met his glance with candour, although a faint colour rose to her face. He went over to the window and drew back the curtains. Then he threw up the sash. Before he turned again, Paula switched out the lamp over her head, so that the room was in darkness. He felt his way over to her. She held the covers open for him. Once in bed their constraint vanished.

" What time are we starting off to-morrow ? " Bill asked.

" I thought about two o'clock. I've got to see my solicitor and make a will and so on. I've some relatives and one or two friends I want to leave my money to."

" I suppose," he said, " I ought also to clear things up. But I'm not going to. What does a bit of muddle matter ? Laura gets everything there is, any way, so I don't care. This would sound incredible to other people, wouldn't it ? But to me it all seems quite natural and inevitable now."

" Yes, that's how it feels to me. I'm glad you're here." As she said this Bill controlled the impulse to turn and put his arms round her.

" They're a funny crew, that Haunt lot," he said.

" Yes, pretty worthless most of them—though a few are all right. Markham's a good sort. You're not used to the kind of people you met in the Crowd to-night, are you ? "

" No, though the whole thing was so odd, I mean my being there at all, and you and everything, that I didn't notice their queerness as I should have done in the ordinary way." He moved his head restlessly.

" Feel sleepy ? " Paula asked.

" Not a bit. Do you ? "

" No."

They were quiet for a little while after that, till Paula changed her position.

" Wish it was over," she said.

" Well, it won't be very long now. Can't you stop thinking and get some rest ? "

" Can you ? "

" No."

" Oh ! well, I suppose it dosen't matter much." She thought, " I wonder why I'm in this mess. Father and Mother seemed fairly normal. I'm a frightful wash-out. Funny

to feel as alone as this, with an entirely strange young man in bed with me."

Bill turned over on to his right side. He thought,

" Suppose Laura's hellishly worried now wondering where I am."

Paula thought,

" What a queer noise the sheets make as you breathe! Almost like leaves rustling far away. At home when I was little, they sounded like that outside the night nursery window. How horribly afraid I used to be of the darkness—when the light went out in the hall!—I must have been about ten. They ought to let all children have night-lights. Those beastly night-mares—cats leaping up and down the walls—then waking up and being sure a burglar was trying to get in at the window. The wind would move the blind a little till I was quite certain someone was behind it. I used to feel absolutely sick with terror. I wish to God I could realise properly that this time to-morrow I shall be dead—dead—I wonder what it feels like— of course, it doesn't feel really—only the going will be pretty ghastly. Perhaps it's just a kind of wild scurry of the flesh fighting against extinction. I remember that rabbit I saw once in Dorset. It was darting from one clump of gorse to another. Its scut was so white. Then there was a bang

and a puff of smoke, and the poor little creature turned head over heels. It seemed to be fighting the air before it died. That farmer fellow came across to find it. He had a white face and a straggling moustache —he didn't look a bit like a farmer. There was a cowed brown dog with him. He picked the dead rabbit up by the scruff of its neck—and he said in a cockney voice, 'Poor little bugger!' Then he stuffed it into a canvas bag he'd got strung over his shoulder. When he walked away his boots left silver smudges in the grass. I wonder why I remember all that so clearly?"

Bill could not bear the silence any longer.

"Tell me something about yourself," he said.

"What do you want to know?"

"Everything—how you've lived; what your parents were like—everything."

"Why do you want to hear?"

"I don't know—well, I suppose I'm interested, and besides, it'll pass the time."

"Can't you really go to sleep?"

"No—can you?"

"No."

"Then tell me."

"All right—where'll I start?"

"At the beginning, please."

"You'll tell me about yourself afterwards —will you?"

" If you like."

Bill turned over on his back. He could see the thin outline of Paula. She was lying on her side, facing towards him.

" I'm ordinary upper middle class," she said. " Father was a judge. He's Scotch, and mother came from the south of Ireland. She belonged to some ancient Irish family." Paula thought, " She was a funny soul. That way she used to walk around the table at breakfast balancing a plate on her head to make us laugh. How father hated it ! " She said, " She was frightfully high-spirited and very Irish. She would never finish anything she was going to say without branching off to another subject. It always annoyed my father. But she simply couldn't help it. We lived in London until I was nearly eleven. Then my eldest brother got T-B. He had scarlet fever and was allowed up too soon. After he died we moved into the country. The doctor thought the change would do mother good. She had a nervous breakdown when he died and then she was always going into hysterics."

Paula thought,

" I'll never forget that move—Roy, Michael, John, Henry, nurse and me, all packed into the 'bus which took us to the station. It must have been summer because a water cart was watering the street as we

left the house. Roy's dog went too near it and got splashed. Nurse was so furious when he jumped up on her white dress that she hit him. Roy got in one of his rages with her for doing it, and tried to fight her. The thuds of the trunks on the roof of the 'bus were mixed up with his shouts of ' I'll tell mother you hit Bob. He's my dog and you're not to touch him, you beast.' What a funny smell the blue upholstery had !— Dust and fog and something else—I've never been able to define it. Every time a trunk thumped down on top, a cloud of fine dust puffed out like smoke from the roof and glittered in the sunlight."

Paula said,

" The new house was big and rambling. The garden was overgrown and rather a jolly place for children. It was about a quarter of a mile away from Colchester."

She thought,

" Yes, it was a good place. It was lovely at Christmas there—picking holly and ivy from the garden and decorating it all. If only Father hadn't always lost his temper on Christmas Eve and made everyone miserable ! Those Christmas mornings ! Waking up incredibly early in the faint light and seeing strange lumpy parcels at the foot of the bed ! Sometimes the sky showed clear frosty stars. That ripping feeling went

though, as we grew older—especially when we knew what rows there were going to be between Father and Mother when the bills began to come in for all the presents and things. Mother wasn't a good manager. It hurts now, when I realise how she loved giving things, even though she knew what trouble she was going to have over it afterwards."

Paula said,

"We lived there for seven years. Just after we moved my brothers were sent off to boarding-school. It was lonely for me then because I'd always been with them. Then I was sent away, too, when I was twelve. It was a big school in Brighton. I hated it. The girls were all little snobs and so damned lady-like. Anyway, I only stayed there a year, because Father had an affair with a village girl and Mother found out about it. It happened at the time she was having my young sister. I think that Patricia was meant to replace Francis, the dead brother. She was delicate and consequently awfully spoiled. Poor little devil, they nearly ruined her life one way and another. She was so much younger than the rest of us that we never had anything in common with her. It was damned unfair on her being born at all. Anyway, I was taken away from school to live at home, because Mother

refused to be alone. Father pretended he'd finished the affair completely. As a matter of fact, he took rooms for the girl in London and lived with her for fifteen years. He'd a son by her. I saw him once—rather a good-looking child. Father was quite potty about him. Mother accepted his word that he'd ceased to see the girl, but she never stopped suspecting him. I realise now that it rather messed up our lives as children. It was rotten for us—we discovered about the woman when we grew up. First John saw him with her in a train during the war, and then I saw them, too, in a restaurant in Soho. We kept it from Mother. She was still in love with him. There didn't seem any point in telling her. But we hated him for it. The boys hated him the most. They were bitter about the child ; I could never see why—it couldn't help being born. In the end Mother found out. She didn't leave him. It was too late. She drank herself to death instead."

Paula thought,

" God, it was hellish ! Mother staggering about, stupid with all that cheap booze she drank. God, it was bloody !—I wonder what sort of a complex it gave me ? It was ghastly. I remember the time when Pat had a miserable love affair and went to pieces and they both drank—half the time

squabbling or maudlin. That night I went to dinner and found Mother on a balcony, with Pat trying to keep her from going over the top of it. I suppose it was hysteria as well as drink, but I didn't understand that then. Father had gone off for a week-end with his woman or something. I got the doctor and when he came Mother screamed and screamed and wouldn't see him. Her poor arm was all black and blue the next day, where she'd tried to pull herself away from Pat. Bloody horrible! I ought to have been better to Pat, but the whole atmosphere made me so miserable I just kept away from it as much as I could. Pretty cowardly of me!"

Paula said,

"Of course, we hated Father long before that business, because he used to thrash us —we were little devils and always in mischief—Mother was very gentle, so he made up for it by being the opposite. We had good times though, in spite of him."

She thought,

"On holidays—we did have good times then — down at Attsborough. That farm we stayed at almost on top of the sea—when you went to the village you could feel the heat from the pavement through the soles of your sandshoes! And that shop we loved, where they sold spades and pails and

boxes covered with shells. The wind used to make the iron spades swing together. I shall never forget the scraping, ringing sound they made; and that field path by the corn field to the edge of the cliff. The field seemed all gold except where it was patched with poppies. Even in Italy the sky has never looked bluer to me than it did there in those lovely days. What fun we had, the boys and me, racing about the place, fishing and shrimping and riding the farm horses."

Paula said,

"I don't think anything much happened to me till I was seventeen. About a year before that we moved from the country to Kensington. Then I went to a high school. I got on all right, but I never made any friends. You see, Mother was so frightfully jealous—you couldn't take any one home because if you did she pulled them to pieces afterwards. I hated that, so I wouldn't take them there. You know how sensitive children are about that sort of thing. It was a pity and meant that I never went out much, because I was not able to return hospitality. Mother resented my attitude, I think, but I couldn't help it. After I left school I got fearfully restless and had incessant rows with Father. I suppose I was difficult at that age. He wanted me to do

domestic jobs in the house and I wouldn't. At the time I didn't know which I wanted to be most, an artist or a journalist. I'd always been keen on drawing. I hadn't any friends—I was awfully lonely. One day I received a letter from one of the local Suffragette leaders asking me if I'd join the W.S.P.U. I went to a meeting they gave—I'd always been interested in the suffrage agitation—I don't remember it at all clearly. It was held in a big room and the women looked like all the other women I knew. Mrs. Pankhurst was supposed to be coming, but she telephoned to say she'd been detained. I know I was very thrilled by the address her deputy gave. I hated men at that time because of my Father. All the things the speaker said seemed so true to me. God, there was a row when Father heard !—One of those devastating quarrels that hurt everybody and never end. I finished it off by being taken ill one night. The doctor said it was appendicitis and I was rushed to a nursing home."

Paula thought,

" I've never forgotten that experience—all the paraphernalia of being prepared for an operation—how the nurse painted my stomach with iodine and bound a wide gauze bandage round me before I went out to the operating theatre—how terrified I was—

I don't believe that after that experience, to-morrow can be much worse—getting up on that narrow trolley —all the pain driven away by sheer fright. The last thing I remember was the huge electric light blazing down so that it almost blinded me, and seeing a flash of silver from the instruments laid out. The anæthetist was very tall. His voice boomed down—'Breathe, deeply, quite easily now. We shan't do anything till you are right off. Breathe deeply and evenly.' Ugh, the foul smell of the ether as you suck it in !—Deadly, sickeningly sweet—ugh !—That floating, slipping-away feeling, and yet being so clear-headed you think you'll never go off. And you move your hands to let them know you're still conscious. Then nothing more, till you wake again with hell in your inside —a great tearing, raging agony, and feeling as sick as a dog. You moan and struggle as you try to become once more part of the body that lies breathing and pain-racked on the bed. No, to-morrow can't be much worse than that."

Paula said,

" Then when I was better I went to the Slade. I took up sculpture. I loved that time. I loved the work. I loved meeting men and women of my own age and discussing all the questions that seem so important

before you're twenty. Even with my father to contend with at home I managed to enjoy myself thoroughly. I lied to him when necessary, and didn't get found out. It wasn't that I was doing anything wrong, but he could never bear to let us do the ordinary things our contemporaries did. He wanted me to go straight home the moment the Slade shut, and his constant restrictions seemed so silly. Now I can see his point of view a bit more, but I couldn't then. I began to become involved with some Irish artists who were Sinn Feiners, but that didn't go far because the war broke out and ordinary life ended abruptly. Isn't all this boring you intolerably ? "

" No, go on please."

" Well, I left the Slade—I couldn't bear being there after my brothers had joined up."

She thought,

" That day Roy went off with the O.P.S.B. Battalion—it seemed useless even then. Roy was rather short. He looked much smaller than the others. It was at Victoria Station. Lots of the reserved carriages were marked ' Old Wykamists, and Paulines, ' and things like that. The boys who'd been at one of the less well-known schools raced along the platform trying to find carriages without labels. Nearly all

of them were wearing grey flannel trousers, sports coats, and caps. They were all so self-conscious and young—buying ginger beer and sandwiches. Just like schoolboys at the beginning of term. Most of them must have got to France pretty soon—Roy didn't—I suppose that the freedom went to his head. A public school's always seemed to me such an inadequate training for life afterwards. I don't see how it helps a boy much to be given a small weekly sum for pocket money, and have all his bills paid by his parents, so that he doesn't understand the value of money at all. Any way, Roy wasn't a success, and he'd been such a steady boy at school. I suppose he'd always been told what to do and his code had been made for him by the masters. He'd never had to think things out for himself, so that he was simply lost when he had to behave like a man. When he really became a drunkard and showed signs of tuberculossis as well, the authorities evidently thought it would be better to discharge him as unfit instead of sending him to the front. That's what they did. I wish they hadn't—he resented not going. It gave him a fearful inferiority complex—poor old Roy—it was so much Father's fault. If only he'd trusted the boys to go right instead of expecting them to go wrong!"

Paula said,

" Before I left the Slade at the beginning of the war, I went on the land with a squad of girls—it was ripping. Long before the official land workers had been organised. We lived on our pay—we got three pence farthing an hour, and when it rained we didn't get anything at all. But it was fun. I'd never been quite on my own like that before. Sometimes we'd barely enough to eat. We had to walk about five miles each day to work. We got up at four o'clock so as to put the cottage we slept in tidy. It was an unfurnished cottage and we slept on straw mattresses. I loved it."

She thought,

" Those mornings were wonderful. June, in the depths of Somerset. The tree trunks swathed in mist and everything drenched in dew. Then the sun would touch it all suddenly, so that the whole world changed to a shining miracle of green and silver and pale gold. God, it was good! How our backs ached, hoeing and spudding, before we became used to it! And the clover harvest! Racing against the coming of a storm!—That glorious elder wine the farmer gave us because we got it in in time!—We drank too much, not knowing its potency, and two of the girls could hardly stagger home. The war seemed so far away."

She said,

" After that I went into a government office. It was a new department and grew like a mushroom. We heard a great deal about the good time other girls were having in the War Office and Admiralty and so on, but we didn't in Pensions. It was sheer hard work. By and by I couldn't stand the rows at home any more, so I left and went off to a room by myself. I met a man at that time and fell rather desperately in love with him. He was in the Air Force and a hard drinker. I first started drinking with him. We got engaged. He was decent in some ways and we kept our heads all the time. He went back to France and crashed. I saw a good deal of my brothers then. They were ripping to me after Desmond was killed, and took me everywhere with them when they were on leave. We went to some queer places too—night clubs and brothels and pubs."

She thought,

" Some of them were a bit thick. I expect the boys were too drunk to realise I was with them. I was lucky to come through it all right."

She said,

" Mother died at the end of the war. Jack and Henry were killed, and it seemed to make her drink more than ever. I was

working like mad all the time, and racketting about at night. After the war I got a job as a journalist for a while until I had a bad nervous breakdown. Friends put me into hospital—they thought I was going off my head."

She thought, " I believed I was too. That night I woke up and felt that half my head had gone. Bloody ! Then the incredible peace of hospital. The quiet nights in the ward. How huge it looked, the high shining windows that reflected endlessly the red-shaded lamp on the report table and the glow of the firelight, from the big square stoves in the middle of the ward, flickering on the polished floor. The narrow beds ; the night nurse standing by her trolley making swabs. It was so quiet—God ! I wish I was there now."

She said,

" I was in there for ten weeks. After that I went to the country. I went to Sussex by myself. I stayed there six months. Sometimes I'd have to fight with myself for a long time because I wanted to die—it all seemed so futile —I didn't do it because of the people who'd been decent to me. The specialist I'd been under in hospital had been ripping and I'd promised him I wouldn't, I recovered in time. The place I stayed at is quite near the cliff we're going over to-

morrow. The spot always fascinated me—I used to avoid that particular walk."

She thought,

" In the end I loved that holiday—just doing nothing except write and read and walk—completely cut off from people and emotions. How I hate having my emotions involved. It's always been disastrous as far as I've been concerned. Oh ! Phil, Phil, you've hurt me so. The last time I slept with you was here, a month ago. You did care about me that night, why have you changed ? We'd been to a dance and were both a bit boozed—was it just the drink that made you so passionate ? " She felt a sob rising to her throat and lay silently fighting it.

" Go on," Bill said, then felt sobs shaking her. He turned over. Her face was buried in her arms. He put his hand out and stroked her hair. After a time she stopped crying and felt for her handkerchief. So Bill left off stroking her hair and turned over on his back again. He stretched his legs, which felt cramped.

Paula said,

" I came back and had rather a thin time. I took on the first job I could get because I wanted to see if I was able to work again properly. I tried to sell somebody's patent fountain pen—it was quite a good pen, but

nobody wanted to buy it—it was a bloody job—I stuck it for six months, and then an uncle of mine died and left me about seven hundred a year."

She thought,

" It was a damned pity Uncle Ted did leave me that money. It took away the urge to work."

She said,

" After that I just messed around. I went to Paris and got in with a drunken crowd—the same kind of people you've seen to-night, only worse. A few of the men are actually the same people—what Markham calls ' four-letter men. ' They're all more or less promiscuous unless they're homos. I don't suppose that there are more than three or four people in all the Crowd who aren't promiscuous—it just doesn't seem to mean anything to them. Perhaps they're right—I don't know."

She thought,

" I'd like to make him understand that promiscuity, like monogamy, is more a point of view than anything else—I'd not have minded Phil having other womem—I'd have stuck it somehow."

She said,

" I tired of Paris and the everlasting drinking, so I came back to London and took this flat. I'd like to have got a

job because I knew how bad it was for me having nothing to do, but as so many people who were hard-up were looking for work, I felt it would be rotten to do that. I'm not cut out for doing the social work some women go in for—East End missions and so on. I don't believe in patching things up —I'd rather have the whole system changed. I don't think there's anything more to tell you. I've just rotted around, getting more and more neurotic and nervy and dependent on alcohol. I'm a decadent and I suspect that the best day's work I'll ever do will be to-morrow. I'm so thirsty I must get a glass of water." She slipped out of bed. A draught of cold air crept down Bill's left side. He hunched the blankets closer around his shoulders.

He thought,

"She's decadent all right, but she's a decent sort. It's a damned shame. She hasn't had much of a chance really—a rotten time at home, bad health, bad parents and too much money. Poor little devil—and now this swine of a man to send her finally off the deep end. She's chaste too."

Paula got a glass from the wash-stand and filled it with water. She lifted up a corner of the blind with one hand while she drank. A soft breeze fanned her face. A few stars shone through the clouds.

" It's stopped raining," she said to Bill. She put the glass down and came back to the bed. Her foot touched one of Bill's as she lay down.

" God ! you're cold," he said, then presently,

" What time is it ? "

" I forgot to put my watch under the pillow, but I heard a clock strike four about half an hour ago. Are you sleepy yet ? "

" No, are you ? "

" No. It's your turn now to tell me about your life, Bill. I wonder what you thought about mine ? "

" On the whole I don't think you've had much of a show. I'm sorry."

" It doesn't matter any more. Now you start."

" It's been quite different from yours. By the way, you didn't say if your father's still alive ? "

" Yes, he is, and my sister and two brothers. But I've seen very little of them for a long time. They're Tories and their friends bore me horribly. I've always resented family ties and I hate people knowing what's happening if I'm having a bad time. It's supposed to be some unpleasant complex, secretiveness ; I've got it all right if that's what it means."

" Oh, that complex stuff," Bill said,

" awful bunkum from what I've heard about it."

" Do you think so ? Well, please go on about you now."

They lay on their sides facing each other. A faint grey light outlined the window. It was still too dark to see each other's faces.

Bill said,

" All right, my father was a clergyman. He was born in Devonshire—so was Mother. They're both dead now. They were killed in a railway accident in France two years ago. We lived at Market Court. It's a village on the Devonshire coast. We had a lovely time as children. I had one brother. He died a year after the war, of shell shock. When I was small I meant to be a clergyman too."

He thought,

" How imaginative children are!—I wanted to do what father did—saw myself taking the Communion Service and preaching sermons. Don't think I was very priggish about it though. Church seemed so exciting in those days—we used to be allowed to go with Mother on Saturday afternoons when she went to arrange the altar flowers. While she was doing it we climbed all over the place. We loved the lectern because of the huge brass eagle. We used to see how close we could get our faces to it without clouding the polish with our breaths. You

could see the large east window reflected in the big ball the eagle stood upon, blue and purple and red, and if you looked hard Mother showed like a tiny speck moving by the altar. I loved hopping into the organist's seat and pretending to play it the way Miss Pincett did on Sundays—rolling her eyes upwards and swaying about from her hips. John liked the font best, because it had all those animals from the ark carved round the edge. The vaults underneath the church were fearfully exciting as well. I remember that time we managed to peep in, the day before the squire was buried. It was too dark to see anything and old Moore wouldn't let us go inside."

Bill said,

"I can't explain how ripping it was—Mother and Father were very fond of each other. He must have been an easy man to live with. He was big whilst she was tiny, like a bird, with dark eyes and black hair. They were pretty popular amongst the villagers. Mother had some money of her own, not much, but it helped things out. The living was a poor one and they gave away far more than they could afford."

He thought,

"One of the reasons I loved it was because it was so sunny—just as if it was for ever summer. There was always something excit-

ing to do, bathing or fishing, or looking for birds' nests. John wouldn't ever let me take the eggs because he didn't want the mother bird to be sad."

Bill said,

" We were cracked about animals. There was always some beast or other being looked after by Mother. She was clever at healing them. A bird with a broken bill, or a rabbit with a crushed foot. We found wild creatures in trouble so often, and brought them home to her to mend. Sometimes they died, but not often. John used to spend nearly all his pocket money in a bird shop we found in the market town near us. He used to buy a thrush, or a linnet, or whatever the wild bird might happen to be that he thought looked most unhappy. The man who kept the shop always put them in a paper bag when he sold them to you. Then John'd carry the bag carefully till he came to a field, where he'd let the bird fly away."

He thought,

" That sea-gull we found on the beach after a bad storm. A great white chap with an injured wing. John always felt sick when he came across a hurt thing, but he wouldn't leave it. That time he had to kill a hare he found screaming in a snare, too badly hurt to save. He couldn't say what was wrong when he came back, but he told mother when

we left him alone with her. Poor old John ! No wonder the war smashed him up ! "

Bill said,

" We had a general help called Mary. I thought she was very old when I was six or so, but I suppose she must have been about thirty. She was thin and ugly and a wonderful worker. She was a ripping soul and somehow so much a part of home that I can't remember being a boy without remembering Mary as well."

He thought,

" What a dance we led her ! Always coming into the kitchen with muddy boots and pails dripping with water, full of newts and tadpoles, for the aquarium. How she scolded, and how we never left off chattering, telling her the adventures we'd been having. She was a stand-by. That time Mother was taken ill at night and Father called me to fetch the doctor. I can always see her coming down the stairs, in a long black coat over her night-dress, with the candle she carried, casting an immense shadow of her on the wall."

He said,

" Well, in the end, John and I went to school. We got on all right after the first term. John was a year younger than me. We went when we were eleven."

Outside the light grew stronger—a cock began to crow.

" Doesn't it sound funny to hear that in the middle of London ? It crows regularly every morning and I never get used to it," Paula said. In the grey light Bill could see her face. Her features looked sharply cut as if in ivory. She saw that he could see her and turned her head away.

" Go on."

" Look here, I feel sleepy at last now it's morning. May I keep the rest for later on today ? "

" Of course. Perhaps I can go off too." They turned over and almost at once fell asleep.

. . . .

At eight o'clock the postman crashed the knocker and woke them up. For a moment Bill wondered where he was. Then he remembered—his head ached and he felt ill.

" So we die to-day," Paula said flippantly.

" With any luck."

" It's a damned good job that my char-lady doesn't appear till the afternoon, but it means we'll have to go out for break-fast. I don't have any as a rule, because by the time I get up it's time for lunch."

She felt much more cheerful. To-day there was a lot to be got through—definite mind-occupying things. She stretched and sat up. Bill looked at her. Her night-gown was made of *crêpe de chine*. He could see

her breast through the thin stuff. So he looked over at the window instead.

" I wonder if it's going to be fine," he said.

" I hope so."

She thought,

" He really is rather a nice creature."

She said,

" I've got to 'phone my solicitor as soon as his office opens, which will be about half past nine. There's a certain amount of business I must fix up. I might as well get up now before I begin to feel like death. It's always all right the first hour after waking, but one goes phut again after that."

" How queer—I don't usually wake up easily, but once I do I feel fit for the rest of the day. I've a head this morning though. I expect it's all that booze last night. I'm not used to consuming quantities."

Paula regarded him.

" You look rather a wreck, poor dear. I'll give you some aspirin in a minute. Have you ever tried a brandy and soda when you feel like this ? It works generally."

" Good God, no ! I couldn't stand drinking so early in the mornig."

" Well, it's a pity. Any way, I'll start and dress. You'd better lie still till I'm ready. When you do get up you'll find all the shaving tackle you want in the white cupboard in the bath-room."

She got out of bed and slipped on a white silk kimono which was hanging over a chair. She collected her clothes, opened and shut cupboards, and finally went out of the room. Bill could hear the bang the geyser made as she lit it, and then the pleasant noise of water running into the bath. Outside the window, sparrows were chirping. He felt very tired and his headache was bad. Paula came back into the room. She carried a glass of water and a bottle of aspirin. She put them down on a chair by Bill's side of the bed.

" Try a couple of these—they may just do the trick."

" Thanks awfully."

When she had gone out of the room Bill took three aspirins and lay down again. After a while he went off into a doze.

When Paula came back again she was dressed. She looked at Bill lying with his eyes shut. She thought again what a good face he'd got. He opened his eyes.

" How's the head now ? " He found the pain had almost gone.

" It's all right. Thanks awfully."

" You can get up now when you want to—I've left everything ready—but don't unless you feel like it—there's plenty of time. I shan't want to go out for breakfast for at least another hour."

" Well, in that case, I think I'll stay here for a bit longer."

Paula nodded and went into the next room. He heard the gas fire being lit. By and by she went to the telephone and asked for a number. She made an appointment to see her solicitor at half past eleven. Bill got out of bed and went over to the window. He pulled up the blind and looked out. It was a good day. The rain-washed sky was a pale pure blue, and a few white clouds sailed southward across it before the wind.

Bill went into the bath-room. He banged the door so that Paula would know he was up. She was at her desk, clearing it. She hardly glanced at the letters as she threw them in a heap on the floor, ready for burning. Once or twice, when the handwriting of some friend caught her eye, she paused to read it for a second, but somehow the contents seemed unreal. She had no letters from Philip, with the exception of a note or two making or cancelling appointments. She threw these on the floor with the rest. She had an impulse to send him a line saying good-bye, but it passed. She thought,

" That would be too absolutely bloody ! "

When she had cleared the last scrap of paper from the desk, she took the whole pile into the kitchen, and putting it in the fire-

place, she lit a match and waited until the mass had been reduced to ashes.

She thought,

" Thank God that's done ! " She went back to the sitting-room and wrote a few cheques for bills she owed. After that, she shut the desk, took the key off her key-ring and left it in the lock. She thought,

" It's a nice desk and it'd be a pity if it had to be broken open." Then she took a book from one of the book-shelves and sat by the fire to wait for Bill.

By and by he came into the room.

" Ready for breakfast, Bill ? "

" Rather ! "

She put the book down and stood up. The sun streamed through the windows and struck the red glints in her hair.

Bill thought,

" She does look stunning ! "

They put on their hats and coats and left the flat. They walked along Gray's Inn Road until they came to an Express Dairy where breakfasts were served. It was practically empty at that time, and they sat down at a table away from the door.

" What are you going to have ? " Bill asked, pushing the menu stand towards her.

The waitress came up just then for orders. Paula only wanted coffee, but Bill ordered haddock and toast as well. The food came

surprisingly quickly. Paula picked up the coffee pot to pour out. The metal handle was fairly hot and she put it down abruptly.

" Bloody hell ! "

Bill was afraid the waitress would hear.

" You use an awful lot of bad language, don't you ? "

Paula was surprised.

" Do I really ? "

" You do rather."

" Well, if I do, what's it matter ? "

" It's a pity, I think."

" Do you, why ? "

" Oh, I don't know, but it sounds rather beastly."

" But I am beastly ! "

" No, you're not. You're an essentially nice person." This annoyed her.

" No, I'm not, I'm beastly, and any way just because we spent the night together and I didn't try to rape you, it doesn't mean I'm nice or any rot like that."

" Sorry you're angry. I didn't mean to offend you."

" That's all right. You know I've a feeling from one of the things you've said, that you're a romantic, and that's a damnable thing to be ! "

" I'm not, at least I don't think I am."

" Yes, you must be, or you wouldn't be planning suicide just because you've built

an illusion round your wife which she's knocked down."

" I'm afraid it's no use discussing that matter." Bill was angry at being called romantic.

" Oh, Hell, don't be a bloody fool ! Have some more coffee ? "

He was going to refuse, but after a pause held his cup out. Neither of them spoke for a time. A cat walked in and came over to Paula. It jumped up on her lap. She poured out some milk for it in her saucer, which she put on the floor. The cat gave a short mew, jumped down and began lapping it up. Paula rested her elbows on the table and supported her chin on her clasped hands.

" Been trying to imagine what I must sound like to people like you. I expect I do swear rather a lot. It's a stupid habit. Sorry I got annoyed." Bill smiled at her.

" It was my fault. Must have sounded a damned interfering prig. So it's all right ? "

" Rather ! "

" What's your programme for the day ? "

" Well, I've an appointment with my solicitor at half past eleven. It's now twenty five past ten. We've time to go and see about hiring a car, or I can do it over the 'phone. Always get them from the same place. What d'you want to do ? "

" Nothing. May I stay around with you ?"

" Of course you can. I'll be glad. We'll give ourselves a good lunch and start off about three, shall we ? "

" Sounds all right."

" How's your head ? "

" Not too good. Suppose it's partly because I didn't sleep. Not used to it."

" I'm sorry it hurts."

The cat had finished the milk and was cleaning its face. An old man sitting behind them kept making unpleasant nasal noices.

" Wish to God he'd blow his nose ! Let's pay and go."

Bill thought,

" Her nerves are in a state ! "

He said,

" Yes, let's." So he picked up the bill and they paid at the desk and went out.

" Shall we taxi to Chancery Lane ? "

" All right." They stopped a cab and Paula told the driver the address and they got in.

" I'd like to get this will business out of the way. We can see about the car afterwards. Tom'll probably see me earlier if he's there. He's a friend as well as my solicitor. A Yorkshire man with a sense of humour. Costs him no end of a lot in the loss of stuffy clients. He's a nice creature. Fights compensation cases for workmen. He's the same Tom Rowland who defends

Communists when they let themselves in for libel actions. You may have heard of him."

" I haven't but that's probably because I've no use for politics. Always skip that part in the papers. The war and just after finished me. Sick of politics. A land fit for heroes and all that bunkum ! "

When they reached Chancery Lane they went up flights and flights of stairs. Bill could hear Paula panting by the time they reached the third floor.

" You should have taken it slower."

" I'm all right, just soft and in rotten condition."

A sharp-featured little girl came to the inquiry hatch when they rang.

" Good morning. Will you ask Mr. Rowland if he can see me now instead of at half past eleven ? "

" He's doing his letters with Miss Sprott. He'll see you right away, Miss Cranford, I expect. I'll go and find out," the child said in a friendly way, and disappeared down the passage.

" Tom's idea of professional dignity would turn most solicitors grey," Paula said, nodding in the direction the girl had taken.

She came back and said,

" He'll see you now, Miss Cranford. This way, please."

When the clerk returned she gave Bill a

morning paper. He found it was the *Daily Herald*.

Inside Rowland's room a tall, thin young man was surveying his client keenly.

" You look pretty jaded. Why don't you cut out this confounded city and live in the country. If I wasn't tied here by the evil ways of employers I'd pack up to-morrow. What've you been doing to yourself ? You look awful. Drinking like a fish and up till all hours of the morning, I suppose. God ! the pack you run with make me sick—a lot of good-for-nothing cumberers-up of a decent earth."

Paula smiled when he stopped.

" Quite so, Tom. How's Mary ? "

" Fit as a flea, and the kids as well. They are bonny youngsters, those two—wish you'd come and see us soon. You keep on saying you will and never do. Maidenhead isn't in Scotland."

" I know—I'd love to fix it up one day—I'll write to Mary."

He made a grimace at her.

" Seriously though, you do look rotten—have you seen a doctor lately ? "

" No, I'm rather run down, but I'm going away to-day."

" Well, what d'you want to see me about?

" A will, Tom. Haven't ever made one, and I want to."

" Why ? "

" Well, I ought to, oughtn't I ? "

" Oh ! I suppose so. All right, I'll get a draft ready for you and send it along in a day or two, if you'll tell me the main outlines now."

" I want it made and signed now, Tom."

" Why, Paula ? "

" Well, I'm going away to-day. Don't quite know where—so I'd like to do it now."

Tom was looking at her rather hard.

" Going away alone, Paula ? "

" No."

" Look here—" he began, then stopped and sighed.

" Oh, it doesn't matter. Suppose you must work things out in your own way. Wished you looked a little more robust, though."

" I'm all right, Tom."

He got up from his seat and went over to a table to refill his fountain pen from a bottle of ink on it, then came back to his desk and sat down.

" How's the Judge, Paula ? "

" All right so far as I know. Haven't seen him for months and months."

" What are your ideas about this will ? "

" Simple enough. Want to leave a third of what I've got to my sister, and half the remaining balance to the rest of my bro-

thers. I mean my own two brothers and that half-brother of mine."

Tom stopped making notes to say,

"That'll need careful drafting because of the little chap being illegitimate."

"And the balance to a girl I've helped sometimes, called Viola Matthews. She's delicate and I don't think she'll be able to earn her own living for very much longer. That's the lot."

"Wouldn't it do her much more good if you gave her a lump sum now? Sounds as if she'll need it much sooner than she'll get it under a will of yours, Paula."

She thought,

"Damn him! I believe he's trying to catch me out."

She said,

"No. So long as I'm alive I'll see she's all right, but I want to know that she's provided for afterwards."

Tom finished his notes and said,

"This'll take a little while to do and I'm horribly busy. Can't you let me send it on to you?"

Paula shook her head,

"Sorry, Tom, but I've got to have it now. Or look here, send it to me by messenger at the Connaught Rooms Grill, not later than two o'clock. I'll lunch there, and they know me in the grill. No good saying you

can't, Tom, because I must have it by then."

" All right—it'll be there at two o'clock somehow."

" Thanks awfully."

Paula got up and they shook hands. He held hers for a moment.

" My dear, I'm worried about you. Can't I persuade you to put off this trip of yours and come and stay with Mary and me for a bit. I could 'phone her now to expect you."

She shook her head and gave his hand a squeeze.

" I'm quite all right really. Don't worry, Tommy." She turned away quickly and went out of the room—when the door closed behind her, Rowland took a step forward as if to follow her. He thought,

" She's pretty desperate—poor little devil—and I can't do anything except make her a will ! " Paula had been wrong. He was too normal himself to think that she was going to commit suicide. But she was unhappy, and he would have liked to help her. He walked back to his desk and rang for Miss Sprott.

Paula went down the passage and found Bill reading the paper. He got up and they went out of the office. On the way down Paula said,

" Tom can't have the will ready for me to sign till two. He's sending it to the Con-

naught Grill Room—mean's lunching there. Do you mind ? "

" Rather not. Didn't he think it a little strange that you should be in such a tearing hurry ? "

" Yes, 'fraid he did rather. He may have guessed, I'm not sure, but obviously there was nothing he could do about it."

She thought,

" Tom's a dear ; he and Mary will be upset when they hear. Think I'll drop him a line if I get a moment and try and make him understand what I've decided's for the best—Phil, what are you doing ?—Phil, I mustn't think—God, it's bloody ! "

She said,

" Let's go along and see about the car."

" Right."

She thought,

" Wonder if he's wavering a bit. More time he has to think about it all, the better—still a chance for him to change his mind. Wonder how far the Crowd's antics last night helped ? "

Bill thought,

" Wonder if she thinks me an awful ass, trailing about with her like this. Doesn't matter if she does—saves me the fag of deciding anything more for myself."

" What sort of a car d'you have ? " he asked.

" Place I go to only keeps Vauxhalls. It's in Bond Street. Thought we'd have a coupé nice and fast—d'you drive ? "

" A bit."

" I've got a speed complex—get a real kick out of it. Knew a man once who raced. He took me several times in small races. God, it was good !—Nice creature, French, got killed racing in France. Speed's damned good. Kind of choke you get in your throat banking at eighty-five."

Bill felt fear grip the pit of his stomach at her words. He thought,

" She'll go like that to-night before we dash over the cliff. It'll be horrible, but thank God this living business will be finished anyway."

Paula said abruptly,

" Bill, why haven't you any children ? " He was silent.

" Don't mind my asking, do you ? "

" No, it isn't that, only the question gave me a jolt. I wish to God we had. Then this affair would probably never have happened. You see, it's my fault—didn't want any—yet. There seemed plenty of time. Laura did at first—I was rotten about it. My income's not big, and I didn't want to have a child unless I could give it a decent time. Just selfishness, I expect. Suppose what I meant was that I couldn't give myself a

good time as well. God, wish we had! Jealous, too, perhaps. Some of us are awful swine like that."

" Men are queer over it, because they generally care frightfully once the children come. I wanted one badly, Bill—life would have been worth while if I'd dared—but I couldn't—not with my beastly record. Been told it's a complex I've got. Means I don't really want a child at all. That my idea about not being good enough to have one and all the rest of it is just rot. Don't know. Even got analysed to try and think differently—didn't work—analyst said my defences were too strong. Only know I wanted one badly. The last year living with Phil, intercourse has been a nerve-racking business. Every time afterwards being terrified I might find I was pregnant in spite of all the precautions I took."

Bill felt pretty bad when he heard her. He thought,

" Sounds as if she's had the hell of a time. No wonder she's sick of it all. And she's so beautiful too—what a mess it all is ! "

He said,

" God knows, Paula, you may be right—we know awfully little about heredity still—and instinct's not a thing to go against generally. We do seem to have messed things

up rather, don't we? Maybe we'll have more sense in some other life."

Paula laughed.

"Hope to God not! If I thought there was a danger of another life, I'd never dare go through with to-night. No, Bill, I believe our only opportunities are here now. We either take them or miss them. Mostly we miss them. All the missed things would make a pretty good world here, I expect."

Bill thought,

"She talks some sense as well as rot."

She went on,

"We grab things so much all the time—least I do—it's hard to be patient—never believing to-morrow will come, just makes you grab, grab, grab—oh! hell, hell!"

"Steady, my dear," Bill said, and put his hand through her arm. She held it hard against her side. He could feel the beat of her heart. She stared straight ahead. Bill tried not to remember anything at all. They reached Charing Cross Station before she spoke again,

"You knock yourself to pieces against the sharp edges of life—oh! Bill, I'm so glad it's all going to end to-night!"

"So am I, damned glad!"

The flower women outside the station were sitting behind baskets of roses. It was

marvellous how dewy and fresh the flowers looked.

" Let's take a bus the rest of the way. It'll be good on top," Paula said.

So they caught a Number 13 and got the front seats outside. The sunshine was dazzling. Paula closed her eyes and only opened them again when they got to Bond Street. They walked down to the show rooms of the firm which hired out the Vauxhalls. A lovely young man came up to Paula beaming.

The lovely young man arranged to have a car at the Connaught Rooms by three o'clock. They went out into the street again.

" Awfully obliging, aren't they ? Advertise their service as unique. Hiring a car out for the purpose of suicide will give their advertisement some truth this time, won't it ? "

" I should think it would rather."

" Won't the insurance company be pleased. Suppose we might easily have taken it now, but they make it so hellishly difficult to leave a car anywhere in town, these days. Lincoln's Inn's probably the nearest parking place to the Connaught. Wonder if there's a Garage Owners' Society for forcing cars off the streets ? "

" Perhaps."

" I say, you're not a very talkative individual, are you ? "

" No—awfully sorry—I haven't a lot to say."

" You seemed to have last night, or rather this morning."

" Oh ! Well, reminiscencing's easy. But all this back chat you sociable people have I can't do at all."

" You'll finish the rest of your story for me on the way down in the car, won't you ?"

" Of course, if you'd like me to."

" God, I want a drink badly ! " She looked at her watch as she spoke.

" It's nearly twelve o'clock. Let's taxi the rest of the way."

They took a taxi, and Bill told the driver where to go. It was a new cab and he seemed to be putting it through its paces. He was good at just missing other motorists' mud-guards.

" Must have been having a celebration," Paula said.

They arrived very quickly. Paula went in while Bill paid off the cab. The bar was crowded and there were no vacant tables. The head waiter came up when he saw Paula and told her he would get her a table if she would wait ten minutes.

" I'm fading away for a drink, Gustave. There's no hurry about food so far as I'm concerned, as long as the bar's open. You know how I lose my head over your olives—

best olives anywhere." He smiled and shrugged—he knew Paula.

Bill came in through the swing-doors. She was talking to the bar-tender. There were a number of women lunching at tables, but she was the only one at the bar. Men were staring at her in admiration. As he passed a table he heard a woman remark,

" Say, I think she's really cute and distinguée. D'you think maybe she's Lady Something or other, Silas ? "

" Gosh, how do I know ! You've got titles right on your brain, Annie, but she's a real good-looker, I grant you."

Bill reached Paula.

" Gustave's getting us a table in a few minutes, Bill. Meanwhile, I've ordered you one of the cocktails of the house. Mixture of brandy, absinth and cointreau with something else as well in it that I've never been able to make out. Walter, who makes them, is a genius."

Waiter smiled with pleasure.

" Madam's appreciation is worth having—she really does know what a cocktail should be like."

He shook the mixture he had made vigorously. The ice tinkled pleasantly in the shaker. He unscrewed the top and poured out an apricot-coloured liquid into two

glasses. Paula pushed one towards Bill and raised her own to him in salute. She drank slowly at first as a compliment to Walter. The man watched her with eyes that looked less cynical than usual. Bill tasted his, then drank it down.

" Good ! What about the same again ? "

She nodded. Walter mixed two more. Bill thought the second one even better than the first.

Gustave came across to tell them a table was vacant. Just then two Americans came through the swing doors—Paula knew them well.

" Gee, it's Paula," the man said, hurrying over when he saw her.

" Hullo, Roddy, didn't know you were back." His companion joined them.

" This is Mr. Cheland, Rita. Bill, this is Mrs. Bankhead and Roddy White," Paula said. They shook hands.

" What rot-gut are you going to have ? " Roddy asked.

" We've already lubricated, Roddy ; we're going to lunch now. Join us, wont' you ? "

"Sure, we'd just love to, Paula," Rita said.

They all went over to the table Gustave was keeping for them. A waiter finished re-setting it as they came up.

" The drink's on us, Paula, to-day—we've

just done a good piece of business and it's our turn this time," Roddy said.

Rita Bankhead was a good-looking, fair woman of about thirty-two—Roddy was younger. He looked like one of the handsome young men who adorn the advertisement pages of the *Saturday Evening Post.*

" Thought you were still in Paris," Paula said to Rita.

" Got in last night—we've had God's own hectic time. Not got to bed till four a.m. for a week. I'm done to a frazzle."

Roddy said,

" We certainly are. We've had the hell of a time apart from business, trying to get Bankhead to fix up the divorce. He just sits around filling himself up with liquor and does damn nothing. After all, he's being asked to do mighty little considering everything. Rita's putting up the money. But will he get a move on, he will not. That man makes me damn sick the way he's treated her."

" Now then, Roddy, don't get mad at Bankhead. He just can't help being what he is. He was brought up so soft by his family. You just can't blame him the way you would an ordinary normal person."

The waiter was holding out the menu.

" What's everybody going to eat ? " Paula asked.

" I'd like some nice honest-to-God English cooking, after the French muck we've been feeding this past week," Rita said.

" Then what about a grilled steak ? "

" That sounds pretty good to me."

By and by a meal was chosen and the waiter went to order it. Gustave came up to ask what they were going to drink. Roddy ordered two bottles of Mumm.

Rita looked keenly at Paula.

" You're looking kind of peaked, my dear," she said.

" I'm all right—just a bit tired. Who was in Paris, Rita ? " Paula asked.

" Not many of the usuals. Met Holbin one night. He was raving about American justice. Couldn't talk about any other topic."

" I guess he's just mad about the Dutton case. You remember it ? " Roddy broke in.

" Don't think so. What was it about ? " Paula asked.

" Oh ! gad, it was just too potty. Ted Dutton came back from Wall Street one evening to find his wife had gone off with a buck nigger named Jesus Hanson. He followed them up, with a gun, found them in an Eastside speakeasy and shot them both dead. There were only two other people present when it happened. Dutton's folks've got pots of money, so they bought one of the witnesses, and framed a case against the

other, a black man. It all worked according to plan and the nigger was executed in the chair. Then Dutton went to one of the Southern states where race feeling runs high and wrote articles in the Press telling how he'd gotten his revenge on Jesus Hanson. This was too much even for New York and they tried to get the State to hand him over, but the State wouldn't 'cos it was a nigger Dutton's wife had run away with. The case is still on all the front pages. Holbin defended the poor devil they electrocuted. Says he's not ever going back to a country that's got a system of justice like that. He says there wasn't a damn thing against the fellow except that he was black; that the other witness was a half-cast Portuguese who had a record like hell and had been kicked out of Portugal."

The champagne came at last and the waiter poured it out.

Paula drank off a glass and Roddy filled it again. Bill wished she would not drink so quickly. After the second bottle was finished the talk became more animated, though it was Rita and Roddy who did most of it. He was in the middle of a good story when a messenger brought Paula an envelope from Rowland. She opened it.

"Got an urgent business document here I must read through and sign—I shall have

to go off by myself for five minutes. Sorry to interrupt the story, Roddy," she said.

" That's all right."

So she went over to a vacant table and took out her fountain pen, then read the will through. She filled in the various names and addresses in the spaces Rowland left blank and signed it. She called Gustave and asked him if he would get two waiters to witness her signature. When they had done so she tipped them a note each and they thought she must have come into some money. She put the will back into the envelope and returned it to Tom by the messenger. She felt a sense of relief. Bill had been watching her out of the corner of his eye. The champagne had elated him.

" What on earth's wrong with Paula—she looks ghastly—I wonder if anything's the matter," Rita said.

" She certainly does look a bit off colour, though she's never exactly brimful of rude health, is she—she rackets about so—and she certainly has got hell's own thirst—why, if I drank what she does I'd be kicking up the turf in a year or so," Roddy said.

" Hush, Roddy," Rita whispered. Paula came back to them.

" Bill, the waiter says the car's here—we ought to be off. Have to go back to the flat for something I've forgotten," she said.

Rita wanted to fix up an evening for bridge, but Paula said she had not got her diary on her, so was not sure when she was free. Bill wanted to laugh. He was a little drunk —his head felt swollen and light. Paula glanced at him. They said good-bye to Rita and Roddy. She liked them and was sorry she would not see them again. After she had paid for the lunch she waited in the hall for Bill to come back from the cloak-room. When he came he said rather shamefacedly,

" Awfully sorry, Paula, I'm rather tight —you must think me an awful ass to be bowled over so quickly—don't generally get like this."

Paula slipped her hand through his arm.

" It's because you're not feeling normal, no sleep, and being nervy and all that ; don't worry," she said.

Outside, a big Vauxhall was waiting with a driver from the Hire Company. When he saw them he got out. Paula signed the receipt he handed her and tipped him. He touched his cap and walked away. She took the driver's seat. Bill got in beside her. After she had started the engine she put the car in gear—it glided smoothly off.

" What d'you think of those two ? " she said.

" Seemed decent for Yankees—don't like Americans generally."

" They're trying to get a divorce in France for Rita, so that they can marry. Finding all sorts of snags about their not being resident over there—she's one of the people it worries not being married and all that. They're desperately in love with each other."

" He's younger, isn't he ? "

" Yes."

" Never before met so many people with matrimonial troubles in all my life as I've met since last night. You don't seem to know a soul who isn't having some kind of difficulty over it."

Paula laughed shortly.

" Suppose it must seem rather like that."

She thought,

" I hope to God he'll draw the right conclusions from it ! "

When they reached the flat she said,

" I must scribble one note and leave the keys. Will you stay here or come up, Bill ? —Shan't be more than five minutes."

" I'll wait here."

She was back again under five minutes. By the clock on the dash-board it was ten minutes past three when they started.

" 'Fraid we'll have to go through the Old Kent Road—the traffic will be filthy for a bit," Paula said.

They drove with hardly a word passing

between them till they were in Bromley. Paula thought,

" Well, London's gone now for me as if it had never existed."

Bill was quite sober again. He felt like death.

" Won't you go on with your story now, Bill ? "

" Of course. Let me think where I'd got to."

" You stopped just where you and your brother had gone to your prep. school."

" Ah ! yes—it was at Worthing. Rather an unusually good school. The head was a fine chap. Public schools were always glad to take boys from him. John got into more trouble than I did, he was so awfully mischievous and loved ragging."

He thought,

" All that time's very indistinct now. I only remember a few odd things like walking in a long crocodile on Sunday mornings after church. We thought we were fearful knuts, and we were just a lot of babies. And climbing that oak tree at the back of the Head's house to get John's cap someone had chucked up there. Got stuck and John came up and got stuck as well, and they had to fetch the gym. sergeant, Adders, yes, that was his name, to rescue us."

He said,

" Can't remember much about that time

except that I had a vile temper if I lost it. One day I fought a boy—when I got him down, after a kind of wrestling-boxing fight I lost my control completely—he'd bitten my leg—I took him by the shoulders and hammered his head on the stone floor of the corridor. John ran up and pulled me off. It was rather beastly and I was afraid of what I'd felt. I prayed hard that night not to lose my temper again—don't think I ever did quite like that either. Made me scared."

He thought,

" Perhaps that's why I ran away yesterday evening when I discovered Laura and Everard. Glad I'd the sense to—would have been terrible if I'd done something I'd have been sorry for. God, what poor weak things we are ! Can I even blame Laura ? Supposing Paula's right, and she was just carried away by a momentary passion ? "

He moved so that he could see Paula's face as she drove. She looked like a delicate pencil drawing. There were no smudged or thickened lines in the features of her face. She glanced round and smiled at him with one corner of her lips.

She thought,

" Hope to God he comes to his senses in time ! "

Bill said,

"After we left Worthing we went to Oundle."

"Oh, were you there? Is it really as fine as one hears?"

"Yes, every bit—at least it was then. Sanderson was still there. He was a marvellous man. John and I left together. He meant to become an engineer and I wanted to be an architect. He went off to the Camborne School of Mines and I went to the R.I.B.A. School to study. Things went awfully well for us. Holidays in Devonshire together with our people. All quiet and happy. Just the kind of time you didn't get, my dear."

"It sounds pretty good," she said.

"It was, until the war—then we were both given commissions in the East Devons. It was awful after that. John hated the whole business far more than I did. We were in France together. I was wounded and sent home. That made it worse for John in some ways, I think. Anyhow, when I got out again, he was at the end of his tether—cracked up about a month later. Never recovered. After the war he went back to Devonshire, and Mother and Father looked after him. He used to have a kind of fit, and when he came out of one he wouldn't talk at all for days together."

" Don't tell me about that part, Bill, if it makes you feel bad."

" Oh ! it doesn't matter much now. Any way, he died about two years ago. It was after his death that my people went off to France for a thorough rest and change. They were killed there in an accident, but I've told you that before."

" You just mentioned it."

She was driving quite slowly. It was a wonderful afternoon. They passed through quiet villages where the horse-chestnut trees were in bloom—creamy spikes of blossom amongst the leaves. In the fields the buttercups looked almost solid, they were growing in such masses. It was a good yellow.

" Let's stop for a bit and sit in a field," she suggested.

" That would be ripping ! "

So when they came to a meadow with a gate into the road, Paula pulled the car up and they got out. They opened the gate and walked along by the hedge inside till they came to an elm that cast a deep shadow. They sat down in the grass. The sun was blazing, but it was quite cool under the tree. Bill lay on his stomach and twiddled the stem of a feathery grass between his fingers. Paula took off her hat. She sat hunched up with her arms round her knees.

" Go on, Bill," she said.

" Well, I'd met Laura some time before that—John liked her—he was better with her than he was with any of us. She was so patient with him—I fell in love with her pretty quickly. She's very lovely, Paula."

He thought,

" Her eyes when she's loving you ! It's as if you went inside her and met her spirit through them."

He said,

" We got married very soon. There was nothing to wait for. I was a member of the R.I.B.A. and I was junior partner in quite a decent firm. So we married."

He thought,

" That night we were married—it only seems a little while ago—we went straight back to the studio in Hampstead. I hadn't understood why Laura was so against a honeymoon away, not till I found out afterwards how she dreaded it all. Poor darling, she was afraid."

He said,

" We had rather a stiff time. She was utterly ignorant. You know what that can mean. Can't think how she'd grown up with so little knowledge. Paula, it was awful —she knew nothing."

He thought,

" The bedroom was tiny, leading off from the studio. So's to get plenty of air, we had

to put the head of the bed close up against the open window. Must be more than three years now since we moved from the studio, but those rooms are just as clear in my mind as the present ones are. When you lay down in the bed you could see a piece of sky above your head. That night the clouds were racing across it—stars shining though them. Laura went to bed first. She had on a bright green silk night-dress, with no sleeves. Made me feel all funny and breathless to see her. When I came in from the bath-room, she made some excuse and went out of the room. I got into bed and lay waiting. I wanted to put my face against her breast and tell her all the things I couldn't say in the light—God, how, my heart thumped! —I meant to be very gentle to her. I was afraid it might frighten her if I let her know how badly I wanted her. Kept reminding myself that it would be wonderful enough just to have her asleep in my arms. By and by, remember looking at my watch once or twice. How time crawls when you're waiting for something wonderful to happen! —After a quarter of an hour I went to see where she'd got to. God! it was hellish, finding her sobbing in a chair in the studio. It took me hours to soothe her. Darling, you were frightened. But in the end it was you who told me you wanted me to make love to

you and touch you. Beauty! I tried to explain that my passion might become too much for me. You said you'd trust me. Thank Heaven, I did manage to keep my head that night. Sent you off to a doctor next day for proper advice. Darling, I've loved you so much — oh! Laura, really loved you, deep down, not only physically. But not enough to let you have a child— how very queer!"

Paula was watching a tiny insect climbing up a long-stemmed grass.

She thought,

"It looks like a jewel. Phil, my dear, I wish you could see it—you love this kind of afternoon, just sitting about in the sun."

She said suddenly,

"Bill, when did you stop believing in God?"

He thought for a moment,

"In the war. I'd believed fairly easily till then. Having a parson father and knowing you had to have faith and all that, kept me from questioning much. But when the war came and I'd seen death closely in France, you had to think. John and I discussed it endlessly with other fellows—we both came to the same conclusion—we didn't let Father or Mother know. It would have hurt them. Didn't seem any point in that. So we went to church when we were home."

" I didn't ever believe at all—least I can't remember doing so. Never could see why there should be anything."

" Well, I suppose there's just as much reason to say you can't see why there shouldn't be. But it's no use worrying. Either you believe or you don't."

" It must be lovely to have a faith, though. I've always envied the people who had. "

It was very still in the field. Only the insects hummed.

" I wish you'd had a better time, Paula," Bill said abruptly.

She gave him one of her crooked smiles.

" Ah well ! it will be all right soon now."

" Paula, are you glad you're going ? "

" Are you ? "

" Yes, in a way."

" I'm glad, Bill. Gladder than I've ever been about anything."

Bill looked at the sunlit field and felt dreadful. By and by Paula said,

" It's nearly five. I expect we'd better be going."

She put on her hat. Bill got up and held out his hands and pulled her to her feet. He liked the feel of her fingers in his, but he let them go at once.

When they reached the car they found a man standing near it with a motor bicycle

which was propped up at the side of the road. He was a short man with a blue shaven face. When he saw them he came up and said to Bill,

" I say, I wonder if you can help me ? My bike's broken down and I must get to Hove to-night. Can you give me a lift to the next town where I can catch a train. I'd be most awfully obliged if you could. That isif the lady doesn't object ? "

" Ask her. It's not my car," Bill said.

The man turned to Paula :

" You see, I must get to Hove by seven o'clock," he said.

" Of course we will. Let us help you to put the bicycle in the dickey. Think you'll find there's room for it next to you."

" That's too kind. I'd love to take her along if I could. Hate to leave her alone in the road in this condition."

Paula's eyebrow twitched faintly at Bill. It sounded odd to hear a motor bicycle talked about as if it was a pregnant woman. Bill and the man got it into the dickey after a struggle. When it was in, the man took a packet of cigarettes out of his pocket and handed them to the others. He explained that he was the manager of a concert party at Hove and had to sing there at eight o'clock that night.

" So you see how vital it is for me to arrive

there in time. Percival O'Dell, that's my professional name, it's really Percival Smith, always keeps his word."

" Well, we'd better be getting on, Mr. O'Dell. Will you get in the dickey ? "

So Percival climbed in next his bicycle, and Bill and Paula got in front. When they had started she said to Bill,

" We might as well take him all the way to Hove—we can go on by the coast road from there. He's pretty hard up, I expect—the end of his trousers are rather frayed—it will save him the fare if we do that. Do you mind ? "

" Rather not. Shall I tell him ? "

" Please."

Bill turned and shouted over the back of the seat,

" If you like we can take you all the way to Hove. We're going that way.

" That's immense of you—immense—the good Samaritan indeed. We'll get in about six by this car. When we do perhaps you'll both honour me by having one at the local tavern—a little liquid refreshment may not come amiss."

" Tell him like hell it won't," Paula said to Bill, so Bill said,

" The lady says we'd love to have one with you."

Percival smiled with pleasure.

" Good, good ! " he said. He thought, " It will look a little bit of all right driving up in this posh-looking car to the saloon bar entrance of the Red Fox Hotel, and bringing these two in to have a drink. Send up the old credit a bit. Besides, it will make Bella sit up. She's a damned sight too fond of sneering at me these days. Always getting off with other fellows under my very eyes. Most of the others will be there too about the time we'll arrive. Bella'll see I'm not quite the poor mutt she thinks."

The car sped along smoothly. The sun-drenched air became cooler as it met the wind from the sea. They were almost in the outskirts of Hove when the engine of the car, with no warning, suddenly stopped. Paula put on the brakes and brought it to a standstill.

" Damnation ! something's gone," she said.

Percival jumped out of the dickey and stood peering helplessly at the back axle. He thought, " Just my luck ! " Paula and Bill got down too.

" Can't have run out of petrol, can we ? " Bill said.

" 'Fraid not. More like the magneto, I should think," Paula said. She opened the bonnet and tried the carburettor. It flooded at once.

" It's not the petrol."

They tried the sparking plugs next, but could not get the faintest spark out of any of them.

" It is the mag. 'Fraid we're done. We can only get her towed in now."

" I'll run to a telephone. There's sure to be one in the row of shops we passed a moment back. I'll get the Royal Hotel Garage to send assistance. They are the biggest in Hove."

" Thanks awfully, that would be kind," Paula said. So Percival started off.

" I wonder when they'll be able to put her right."

" Oh ! hell, I don't know. It's all getting on my nerves a bit," she put her hands in front of her eyes and stood like that for a moment. Bill came closer.

" Poor darling. Don't worry. After all, what does another few hours or so matter ? " She smiled at him queerly.

" No, probably it's a good thing," she said, and he wondered what was in her mind.

They got into the car to wait for Percival to come back. He did so in a few minutes. He was panting. When he had regained his breath he said,

" They'll be here in fifteen minutes. George, the manager of the Royal Garage, is an old pal of mine. He'll rush the repairs

through for you. You can depend on that. I've explained to him how you helped me and he's promised."

" That's nice of you, Mr. O'Dell," Paula said gratefully.

Percival thought, " Now, how am I going to get them to the Red Fox. It' s a pity about this breakdown. A damned pity."

They talked about accidents and motoring mishaps until the repair lorry came. Paula left Percival to give the instructions, as he knew the driver. After a few minutes' talk he came back to say,

" My friend George will be delighted to put the job in hand at once. May I suggest you both come along to the Red Fox Hotel, George can 'phone us there as to how long it's going to take to put the car right."

" That seems as good an arrangement as anything else, doesn't it ? I've a thirst on me that must be dealt with urgently," Paula said to Bill.

" All right," he answered. Percival beamed with pleasure.

" Good, I'll tell George we'll be there."

He went to talk to the man who was putting a tow rope on the Vauxhall. He thought,

" In any case, this girl'll impress Bella even without a car—she's obviously the real thing."

After he had fixed up about where they would be, he came back and they stopped a 'bus which was passing, and got in. When they were seated, Paula said,

" I don't believe I told your our names. This is Mr. Cheland and my name is Cranford."

Bill was embarrassed because Percival insisted on shaking hands with him and saying,

" Pleased to meet you, Mr. Cheland. Very pleased indeed to make your and Miss Cranford's acquaintance."

" We get off here," he said presently. So they left the 'bus at its next stop and walked to the Red Fox Hotel. It was a small public house in a road leading off the sea-front. They all went into the saloon bar. One glance round showed clearly that it was used by members of the Profession. The walls were covered with photographs of actors and actresses. All of them bore some kind of wild signature scrawled across the corner. Ma Trixie, who ran it, had started in Panto, passed on to the Legitimate and then sidestepped into Variety. Her marriage with Mr. Hinkley, from whom she had purchased the Red Fox when it had fallen on evil days, had brought new life and custom to its doors. All the members of concert parties gathered there each evening before the show. All

the boys and girls in the Number I Companies who played at the theatre in Hove for a week, came to have one nightly in the saloon bar.

Percival was greeted on his entrance with shouts of,

" Hullo, Perce," " How are you, dear boy ? " and other similar cries.

O'Dell made his way with dignity to the bar. Bill and Paula followed him.

" What's yours ? " he asked them.

Paula tried to think of something cheap, and chose port. Bill's request was for a pint of bitter. Percival, surprisingly, ordered himself a crème de menthe—Ma Trixie served them the drink herself. She had noticed Paula as soon as she came in through the door.

" May I introduce you to the boys and girls in our show ? " Percival said when they had emptied their glasses.

" Please do," Paula said. He went off to collect some of them from different parts of the bar.

" Order me a double brandy, please, Bill. I feel pretty dim," Paula said when they were alone.

" With soda."

" Virginal, thanks."

He got it for her and brought it over to the table to which she had moved. He took the seat next her.

" I suppose we'll just have to stay here till Percival's George 'phones," she said.

" Yes, I suppose so," Paula tossed down the brandy ; it stung the back of her throat, she grimaced.

" Ugh ! Hate it sometimes. Almost like medicine."

" You drink the damned stuff at such a rate. What's the good of getting blind ? "

" Can't now, my dear. At least not easily. That's the hellish part of it. Order me another, Bill." He frowned, but rose and went across for another. To Paula the atmosphere of the bar was changing. She thought,

" Not such a bad hole. Pubs always have a less frigid air of virtue than most places of English entertainment. Damned hypocrisy."

O'Dell came over with two women and a tall dark young man.

" Miss Cranford, may I introduce Miss Bella Perkins, Miss Suzette Chalmers and Mr. Tom Bellingham ?" Percival said.

They all shook hand. Bella was pretty in a common fair-haired way—Suzette was dark—she cultivated a languid manner which only disappeared if she drank too much.

" We hope you and your friend will come along and see the show to-night. It's not too bad, though I know they say self-praise is no recommendation, but it's all right, isn't it, Perce ? " Bella said.

" I should say so indeed. A unique little show. Intimate, I think, describes it best. You must hear Tom sing ' God Remembers when the World Forgets.' It's a treat. He's a baritone, of course."

Paula thought,

" I can just imagine him singing that ghastly song."

Bill came up with Paula's brandy. He was introduced to the others.

" What will you all drink ? " he asked. When they had chosen, Percival said to Paula,

" George will ring me up here and let us know the first possible moment the car can be ready. Your misfortune is our gain, Miss Cranford. Could almost find it in my heart to hope it won't be repaired too quickly ! "

" I'm afraid it may be a long job," she said.

The drinks came, and after that more were ordered and again more. Presently Paula discovered from Bella that there was a room where she could have a wash.

" Come on, I'll show you where it is," she said.

They went though a door leading into the private part of the house, and up some stairs.

" How that O'Dell does go on, it's really chronic," Bella said on the way up.

" He seems very obliging."

" Obliging, oh ! he's that all right. But he's so jealous. You'd never believe, dear. The way he carries on if I so much as look at another boy ! "

" Well, it's compliment in a way, isn't it ?"

" Compliment be damned. It's confounded nuisance. I'm not going to tie myself up with anyone, and so I've told him straight. Did it for six years, but never again. I like talking to other men and, may be, having a bit of flirtation with them, but nothing wrong, you understand ! "

Paula did not know what to say, but apparently it was unnecessary to answer Miss Perkins.

" He's afraid I'll leave the show. That's what he is afraid of. He knows I draw the men. It would surprise you, dear, the number of letters I get from the front of the house. Some of them such nice boys. Real gentlemen when they take you out. Know how to treat a girl. Suzette gets a lot, too. She's all right, but such a cat. You'd never believe the coarse accusations she makes against me, for all her ladylike airs."

They reached the cloakroom and Paula managed to escape for a moment. She left Bella powdering her face before a mirror with a brooding expression in her eyes. When Paula came back she went over to the hand

basin to wash. Bella stood watching her. She admired her poise, although she could not understand what it was exactly. She looked again in the mirror.

" Do you think I look very loud ? " she asked.

Paula replied quickly,

" No. Of course, blondes are always more striking looking than brunettes, aren't they ?"

" Suzette says that anyone could see with half an eye that I was fast by the look of me—I'm not, dear, unless sleeping with Percival once in a while's fast. Suppose that's shocked you—can't think why I'm blabbing like this."

" Why should I be shocked ?" Paula said rather gently.

" Oh, well, I can see you're not like us girls so I thought you might be."

" I feel fairly clean and tidy again—shall we go down now ? " Paula suggested.

When they reached the bar they saw that two more young men had joined the group round the table.

"That's Charlie and Jack," Bella explained. " They're both perfect screams. Charlie's the dark one, the one with ginger hair's Jack. Charlie plays the piano and Jack sings the comics. They're cautions when they get going. You'll like them."

The young men were introduced to her.

" I hope you're wellenski," Charlie said. His latest gambit was the adding of " ensky " to the end of every possible word. Paula thought the trick rather tiresome.

Jack said to Bella,

" Not lost your band parts, I do hope."

" Funny, aren't you ? " she retorted.

Paula had some more brandy. She sat next to Bill, who was silent. She listened to the chatter of the others. Although they talked without stopping, there did not seem to be any point in the conversation at all. It was full of clichés and slang phrases, but nobody troubled to complete a sentence.

She thought,

" Perhaps I can't make out what they mean because I've had the hell of a lot of brandy—they all seem to be a bit on, too, thank goodness."

Percival was called to the telephone. When he came back he leaned over Paula's chair and said,

" It's old George on the 'phone. He says that if you don't mind paying a bit extra, the men will work overtime and get the car ready by midnight. You were right. It is the magneto."

" By midnight. That's good. Would you tell him, of course I'll pay the extra ? "

Although she was not certain about it, she thought she saw Bill wince when he heard her

say this. The next moment he left the table to fetch himself another drink. When Percival came back, Bella and Suzette were quarrelling as to which was the more attractive.

" What men can see in a great gawk of a girl like you I can't for the life of me think," Bella said.

" Well, anyway, I don't get the colour of a beetroot if I take a glass of stout," Suzette retorted.

" Bloody beetroot yourself."

Percival said hurriedly,

" Ladies, ladies, remember there are guests with us."

" Well, tell them to get out if we aren't good enough for them," Suzette said. Every body else began to talk loudly. Paula was amused.

" Jack, did I ever tell you about my landlady at Herne Bay last summer? Wanted to marry yours truly. Sixty if she was a day. Not quite nicenski, was it ? " Charlie said.

Standing against the bar were three men in bowler hats, arguing. They became so heated that their words were audible even above the general babel of sound.

" I tell you, she's shifted the lavatory over to the other side."

" She 'asn't—she can't 'ave 'cos if she 'ad it wouldn't 'ave been economical."

" I tell you she 'as " ; the man speaking

began to draw a plan with his finger on the wet counter.

" 'Ere's the partition, the old one that is," he said.

" That's right," the third man who had not spoken before broke in.

" You're wrong," the first shouted, and, with a sweep of his hand towards the diagram, a glass of liquid went crashing to the floor.

" Bloody 'ell, why can't you look wot you're doing,"the owner of the drink shouted, mopping his trouser legs with his handkerchief. The man who had knocked the glass over ordered him a fresh drink, and for a few minutes peace was restored. But by and by the discussion began again.

" She moved the lavatory from 'ere to over there before she got rid of it."

" Hell, what a monotonous conversation," Paula said, as she turned round the other way. She could hear two women talking in high voices. They were out of sight behind a screen that jutted from the wall.

" Yes, dear, he's just out of his college. Took me to dinner last night—such a nice fella."

" What's he look like ? "

" Oh ! he's lovely, tall and dark."

Paula whispered to Bill,

" I can't bear it here any longer. Let's go."

Percival heard her words, for he said,

" It's nearly seven o'clock and we'll have to be at the show by 7.45. I must run home and get a bite."

His words drew the group round the table to their feet.

" If you'll accept a couple of front seats for the show to-night we'll be honoured," he said to Paula.

We'd love to, wouldn't we, Bill ? "

" Rather."

" Well, that's settled then. I'll explain exactly how you get there."

" Why not come and dine with us somewhere now and then we can go along with you afterwards," she suggested. He was quite coy about accepting, but finally did.

" Where's the best place to go to ? " Paula asked.

" Well, the best's the Royal Hotel, but it's not cheap."

" Let's go there, Paula," Bill said.

So they nodded at the others, who looked a little superciliously at Percival, and left the Red Fox. They walked along the front. The sun was already beginning to set. The sea lay tranquil, a strange hyacinth blue in the evening light. Bill looked at it and thought,

" Oh, Laura beloved, what have we done ?

Paula looked too.

The brandy she had consumed was taking effect rapidly in the fresh air.

" God, I'm sick of this world," she thought. " Oh ! cold beautiful sea, I'm coming quite soon. Hell, I am drunk. Must pull myself together or this actor person may guess. Phil, I want you now, here " ; she felt pretty bad.

Percival thought,

" She looks odd smiling in that way—I believe she's squiffed. Poor thing, there is some thing very wrong—she has a most tragic expression—suppose she's his mistress —bit of a mystery though—wonder if they'll have duck and green peas on the Royal menu to-night—God, I can do with a real blow out."

" Do you know Hove, Miss Cranford ? " he asked.

" No, passed through by car, of course, often, but never had to stop before."

" It's an extremely nice town—we've a most go-ahead Borough Council. They look after the amenities very well. Sanitation and so on. It's a clean town. And they make a special point of catering for their visitors' comfort."

" Really, that's jolly, isn't it ?—Wonder

why there are any visitors to cater for, though."

Percival laughed a little too heartily.

" Very good, oh, that's very good, Miss Cranford. Why are there any visitors ? "

" How long does your season last here ?" Bill asked hastily.

" You mean our own show ? "

" Yes."

" Till the end of September. If it's a fine autumn, even later. As long as the audiences can sit out in the evening and not feel chilly — our little show's called the Jazzers—we wear jazz pierrot costumes. Rather a good idea, don't you think ? "

" Awfully."

" So bloody original," Paula said.

Bill whispered sharply in her ear,

" You're tight, Paula, and disgustingly rude. Pull yourself together."

" Balls," she said loudly.

Percival pretended not to hear. He wanted that dinner. Paula shut her eyes tightly for a moment and tried to get her head clear. She said slowly,

" What do you do after the season, Mr. O'Dell ?"

" Rest, you know, unless I get a part in panto, but panto is not what it was. Too many cinemas and revues, so generally I rest."

Even the brandy did not make Paula proof against the pathos of this remark. " No wonder the ends of the poor little thing's trouser legs are frayed. I'll be nice to him for the rest of the evening," she thought.

Presently they arrived at the Royal. It was a large grey hotel. The atmosphere of the lounge was depressing in the extreme.

" What did you say this place's called ? " Paula asked.

" The Royal."

" Queer, would have sworn it was the Victoria." Percival looked flustered.

" Oh, no, the Victoria's much further along. It's the last hotel on the front, as a matter of fact."

" Well, anyway, let's eat," Bill said. So they went into the dining room. Less than half the tables were occupied.

" I shall have to hurry, I'm afraid. It's a quarter-past seven now and I must be in the dressing-room by seven forty-five."

" We'll buck them up, then."

The head waiter came at once when Bill beckoned to him. He gave them a table by the wall.

" We've got hardly any time for a meal, so will you get us served quickly," Bill asked.

" Yes sir, certainly sir," and he called another waiter to take their order.

Bill read out the menu :

" There's only the table d'hote dinner. It is grape fruit and hors d'œuvre, tomato soup, St. Julienne, fried sole, lobster, roast duck, beef, apple pie, trifle, and rice pudding. I expect it'll be quicker to order the whole thing now. What are you going to have, Paula ? "

" I'm not hungry. I suppose I'd better have something, though. Oh ! I don't know, grape fruit, and lobster, that's all, thanks."

" Have some duck and green peas as well."

" No, thanks. Perhaps I'll have some cheese or something later on. I'll see how I feel after the lobster."

" How about you ? " he asked Percival.

" 'Fraid I'm hungry. I'd like tomato soup, and lobster, with duck and vegetable to follow, and a bit of apple pie, please."

" I'll have grape fruit and sole and roast beef," Bill decided.

The waiter turned away.

" What d'you want to drink, Paula ? "

" Stick to brandy, please."

Percival chose whisky and so did Bill.

While they waited for the food to come, Paula glanced round the room.

The occupants looked pretty dreary.

" Why on earth do these people go away for holidays ? " she said.

" Suppose they enjoy it," Bill answered.

" But they all took so bored. Just look at them."

Percival was surprised. He had been thinking how wonderful it must be to be able to afford to stay in a place like the Royal.

" But, Miss Cranford," he said, " they can't be bored—why this hotel's the best in Hove. They don't take in just anybody here, you know. It's very expensive."

" That'll account for their expressions, perhaps. God, they look like half-dead fish. Makes me want to throw a plate on the floor so's they'd jump."

" For Heaven's sake don't, Paula. Besides why should they be made to jump ? They're all right in their own way. Serve some sort of useful purpose in the scheme of things, no doubt."

" I should think so indeed. Why, Miss Cranford, nearly every one of them's got a car and a chauffeur. You've no idea how well off they are. I don't think they can be really bored."

He thought,

" She doesn't understand that they look bored because they've plenty of money. No need to pretend to be cheerful and have no worries. They can be natural, the lucky devils ! "

" But what do they do with themselves ? What do they read and think ? " she asked.

" Suppose they read popular novels and think whatever the paper they read tells them to. Of course, it means they don't think at all, but I don't suppose they're any the worse off for that, Paula," Bill said.

" And what do they do here all day ? "

" Well," Percival said, " suppose most of them get up about half-past nine and have a jolly fine breakfast, then go off to the golf club or to the promenade and some of them bathe. Then there's lunch and after that tennis or a drive in the car till it's tea-time and then a rest till they have to change for dinner. After dinner they'll go to the various shows in Hove or drive over to the theatre at Brighton or may be stay here and play bridge till it's bed-time—and that's a jolly fine day for anyone, I should think."

" And what do they talk about ? " she persisted.

" Well, I can't say I know what they talk about exactly. Same as the rest of us, I suppose—what their friends have been doing ; the weather, the news in the papers. Oh ! You know all the things we all talk about," Percival said. He thought,

" I'd have expected her to know better than me what well-off people talk about."

The waiter brought them the second course—Percival thought it wiser to change the subject.

" May I inquire if you are from London ? "

" Yes, we are."

" A wonderful city—do you know Brixton ? My home is there—I was born in that district, as a matter of fact—it's changed since then—grown out of all recognition"

" I've been there, but I don't know it well. Is it a nice part to live in ? " Paula asked. She remembered that she had decided to be nice to Percival.

" Not too bad, not too bad. There're good 'bus routes and of course the tram service is marvellous. Frequent and cheap. Yes, it's a most handy place to live in if you have to go up West much, as I do. Agents and all that."

Paula thought,

" Suppose you're one of the out-of-work actors one sees waiting about the entrances of the Theatrical Agencies. Those places off Leicester Square and Charing Cross Road."

" Are you an admirer of the Drama, Miss Cranford ? " Percival asked, determined to be conversational.

" Yes, some drama."

" Did you see the *Constant Nymph* ? Now that was a great play if you like," he said.

" No, I missed it," she said, and thought,

" God ! What a time I had managing to do so."

" I saw it. Thought it was jolly well acted," Bill said.

" Yes, not too bad, not too bad. A lot of the casting was all wrong, though," Percival said patronisingly. He went on,

" It was my ambition to become an actor from the time I was a kid. Always mad keen about it. Read Shakespeare and went to the local shows—saved up all my pocket money for the gallery. But without influence you don't get far, not to the top of the tree."

Paula thought of all the youngsters she knew who were getting there, not because they had influence, but because they possessed instead that even greater asset, talent. She was sorry for Percival. Bill saw her expression become gentle.

" Yes, it must be an awfully hard life," she said.

" It is, but it's got its compensations. As I often say, in what other profession could a man spend the whole of the summer by the sea as I can ? Very few, Miss Cranford, very few."

" Yes, that's an advantage," Bill said.

Paula thought,

" Yes, and when it rains and the seats are empty and the bag you take round remains light and limp, and there's the rest of the

company waiting for their pay on Friday night and their landladies waiting in turn for them, yes, it must have the hell of a lot of advantages. A bloody life. I remember that little pierrette girl I met at Lowestoft once. She told me how awful it was. She got pneumonia that summer, and Mother sent her fruit and jellies and things. In the end Mother got to know the rest of the company and arranged with a restaurant on the front to send them down a big can of hot soup during the interval when the nights were chilly. She was good like that. How grateful the poor devils were for it."

" I'm afraid I'll have to rush off now," Percival said, " but don't you two hurry—simply ask for the Jazzers—anybody in Hove'll tell you where the pitch is. I'll be at the paybox—so long and many, many thanks for this delightful meal."

He got up. Paula smiled at him. He made a good exit.

He thought, importantly because of the whisky inside him,

" Wonder how many of the people here recognise me. A good few, I expect."

" Coffee, Paula ? " Bill said.

" Yes, please."

They had liqueur brandies with it.

" I must get some more cigarettes."

" It's all right, Bill, I've plenty here."

When they had almost finished, he said :

" Are you going to try and start off to-night or stay here till the morning ? "

" Don't know. I'm well away now and don't want to get sober. Means I mayn't be fit to drive by the time the car's ready. In which case suppose we'll have to stay here till to-morrow. Can't risk messing it up now."

" Why not sober up."

" Don't want to."

" As a matter of fact, my dear, I'm a bit tight myself. Shall we go along now ?"

" Might as well."

Bill paid for the dinner and while Paula was upstairs he went to the Reception Clerk's office.

" Our car's broken down," he explained. " We may have to stay here. Depends on how quickly your garage people get her right. If we do have to stay, can you give us a couple of rooms for the night ? "

The clerk looked at her book and said :

" Yes. You can have rooms 19 and 21 on the second floor."

" Thanks. If we have to stay, we'll take them. I suppose you've a night porter on duty. You see, we mayn't know till the last minute—we're going out now and the car can't be ready till midnight anyway."

" That's all right. If the front door's closed

when you come in,you can ring the night porter's bell."

" Good," Bill said and went off to have a wash—when he came back Paula was waiting for him in the lounge. He did not tell her what he had arranged, because he thought she might sober up if she knew nothing about the rooms.

They took a cab to the Jazzers. She leaned against him, because she was too tired to sit up straight by herself. He thought,

" Laura, you must be nearly off your head wondering where I am." It made him feel pretty mean.

" Bill, I feel like death. Look after me, darling," Paula said suddenly.

"That's all right. I will. Don't worry."

" I shall have to get tighter. I'm in a perfectly bloody intermediate stage at present."

The cab stopped and the driver got down to tell them that this was where the Jazzers had their pitch. The stand was in the corner of a sunken square lawn which had laurel bushes all round it. The covered platform stood in a corner on the sea side of the square. A small lean-to shed was built on the back. It was divided by a partition. One side of it was used by Bella and Suzette, and the other side by the men, as dressing rooms.

A pair of old and faded black velvet cur-

tains hid the stage from view. A shoulder-high screen of canvas shut off the pitch from the rest of the lawn. Percival was sitting inside the little pay-box when Bill and Paula arrived. He seemed to know most of the people who were buying tickets for their seats. He had changed into a shabby pierrot costume. It was patched with different coloured pieces of sateen. He had a big black ruffle round his neck, and a pointed white felt cone-shaped hat was perched on the side of his head. His face was painted a bright rose pink and his eyes were heavily made up.

" Ah ! here you are," he said when Paula stopped by the desk, " so delighted you managed to come."

Two girls who were just moving into the enclosure turned round to gape, impressed by such condescension from the manager of the Jazzers.

" I've put you in the front row—six seats along from this end—see you later ! " They walked off to the front row. Because it was Saturday night the cheaper seats were filled, but there were a good many vacant ones in the first few rows.

Paula sat down and stared straight ahead. Bill wished she did not look so unhappy. Once he said,

" Are you all right ? " She nodded in

reply. She was trying to keep her mind away from the thought,

" This time last night " and all it implied. By and by the curtains were drawn back and Charlie could be seen seated at the piano. He was improvising and played what he called his " till ready."

The sides of the stage were hung with black. A white glare from the footlights made him look pale in spite of his paint. He was dressed in the same way as Percival except that his ruff was scarlet. His rather coarse good looks were toned down ; his fingers sped easily over the keys of the piano. Because his coloured costume and the atmosphere of the stage cast a certain kind of glamour over him, Paula could understand the whispered remark of a girl sitting behind her,

" Oh ! isn't he lovely."

From where she sat she could see a flat disc of a moon. Its reflection lay like a blade of silver across the sea. A sharp breeze blew against her face.

" Quite warm, my dear ? " Bill said.

She whispered, " Yes, thanks." Suddenly through an opening in the drapery at the back of the stage the Jazzers trooped in. They stood in a row and sang an amazingly stupid song, beginning,

" We are the Jazzers of Hove-on-Sea " to

the tune of " Who Killed Cock Robin." It was so bad that Paula realised she was going to enjoy it. Every member of the company looked utterly changed in their costumes and paint. Bella was really pretty and Suzette ravishing. The men shared just as much in this general transformation. They sang part songs, funny songs, and sentimental songs, and all incredibly badly. The girls had no voices to speak of and lacked any acting ability whatever. Their movements were self-conscious and stiff and their dancing clumsy. The men matched them in every way, with the exception of Tom Bellingham, who, most surprisingly, possessed a well-trained and beautiful baritone voice. At the end of his first song Paula whispered to Bill,

" Now, why in God's name is that man running with these morons ? "

" He told me. He's in love with Suzette. It's the only way he can be near her. She's married already."

" Ah ! "

During the interval Jack came up to them.

" The others have asked me to say they wish you'd come round to the dressing-room and have a drink with us," he said. So Bill and Paula got up and went round to the back with him. They had to stoop to go

through the door. The shed was illuminated by the light of a candle. Suzette was sitting in a corner on a wicker dress basket by herself. She was coughing. The others were gathered round a packing case which served as a table. Percival cried,

" Cheerio," when they came in. " The show's going well to-night, don't you think?" Bella asked Paula.

" The applause is great," Percival said.

" That new verse in the Topical went down all right, didn't, it, Perce?" Jack said.

Tom Bellingham had left the group and was standing near Suzette as she coughed. He looked miserable and baffled. He tried to give her a glass of water, but she waved him away impatiently.

" Oh ! leave me alone, do," she muttered breathlessly. " I'm sick of the whole blasted lot of you. The draught on that stage's enough to kill an ox. And there's us girls in short sleeves and bare necks. It's a damned scandal."

" Oh! give over grousing, do," Bella called. Otherwise nobody took any notice of her.

Percival was pouring out the drink into a collection of cups and mugs which stood on the packing case. Paula was given a cup of port and Bill found his mug held neat whisky—when they had all got something, Percival lifted up his drink,

" Well, here's hoping," he said, and they gulped the liquor down.

There was a heavy smell of old clothes, grease paint and powder in the shed.

" Well, what d'you think of our little dug-out ? Not too dusty ? " Bella said to Paula.

" Rather not. Surprisingly snug, isn't it " ?

" Yes, it's all right. Not too weather proof when it rains, but there, we mustn't grumble."

" Who's got the bag to-night ? " Percival inquired.

" Charlie," Jack said. " I've kept some whisky for him." Then he went nearer and whispered in Percival's ear.

" Splendid, after all it's Saturday," the little man said, and then to everybody,

" Jack and Charlie have asked us all to a B.Y.O.B. party at their rooms to-night. Who's coming ? Needless to say, our two guests are included in the invite."

There was a general chorus of assent.

Suzette, who had revived after her cup of port, said,

" Bella and me could pop round to our place on the way. There's that bottle of crème de menthe half full, that your friend gave us last week, Bel." A frown passed across Percival's face—he had had words with Bella on the subject of that friend.

" Good," Jack said, " then you'll all come. Mrs. Black's a decent sort. Never minds a bit of a do on a Saturday night so long as nobody's sick on the stairs."

Bill thought,

" Good God, they must have some queer guests."

Charlie came in with the collecting bag and Jack handed him his share of the whisky. Paula shivered and Percival noticed it.

" We'll have to go on again now, but if you're cold and would like to sit in here for a bit, Miss Cranford, you're both very welcome," he said.

" Thanks so much. Perhaps we will for a few minutes."

The company trooped back to the stage—when they had gone the little room seemed shabbier than ever. Paula went over to where Suzette had been sitting. There was a pile of old hangings on the trunk. She sat down and motioned to Bill. He walked over and sat beside her. They did not speak. The candle flame flickered and sent mysterious shadows dancing on the walls. By and by she leaned against his shoulder and he put his arm around her gently. The sound of the piano came back to them from the stage, faint and tinkling—the chorus of a song seemed unearthly as they

listened, because the wind was blowing in from the sea and carried the sound away. The boards at the side of the shed did not fit too well. The wind came through in piercing draughts. They could hear the waves quite near, breaking on the beach.

Paula stared across the room hopelessly.

" Don't look like that. It will soon be over. I can't bear it when you look like that," he exclaimed.

" I'm sorry, darling. I still feel hazy with booze."

" Paula, I can't believe I met you for the first time last night. It seems such ages." The crooked smile he had already come to recognise curled her lips.

" Well, we've lived fairly hard since then, haven't we ? You know I approve of you. You're a nice person. You behaved so beautifully last night." He turned quickly at her words and kissed her.

" You made it pretty easy for me to do so, didn't you ? " In the silence that followed they could hear Percival telling a funny story. It was a very old and dull funny story, but at the end of it there came a gust of distant laughter.

" Doesn't it smell queer in here ? " Bill said.

" Yes, it's a bit niffy—shall we go out again now ? " He nodded, and they went

out and round to their seats. It was a fine night. The sky was thickly sown with stars. Paula wanted to tell Bill that he must not think any more about coming with her over the cliff, but she did not know how to begin. She could just see his profile by turning her head slightly towards him without his knowing she could. She wondered what time the car would be ready. Bill kept thinking about Laura. A host of tiny memories crowded into his mind. He felt that his anger of the night before had been rather blind and beastly, yet fundamentally, surely, it had been just. The mainspring of their life together had been an unspoken belief in an ideal of mutual chastity. In Laura's case, apparently, that ideal did not exist. The sudden shock of finding out his mistake had made it impossible for him to think about the matter without becoming emotionally overwhelmed. Even at this moment the desire to kill Everard surged again into his mind. It was from this desire he had fled last night, it was this urge that was hurrying him along the path Paula had chosen. Thinking of her, he turned towards her and their eyes met.

She thought,

" He's worked himself up again. Damn. He's been thinking of how he found them

together. What a bloody thing memory can be sometimes."

The Jazzers had nearly finished their performance.

She thought,

" How on earth can they go on night after night ? Don't they ever become filled with an utter loathing of life? A hatred of its futility, its implacable greed—what's the good of it all? I hate it. It's all so damned unfair."

The Jazzers were singing their last song. They finished and Charlie played " God Save the King." The audience clapped, some —of them enthusiastically—Jack and Tom pulled the shabby curtains across the stage. The audience stopped clapping.

" We'd better go round to the back, I suppose," Bill said.

" Yes, all right. It's damned cold now," she turned up the collar of her coat.

Percival was counting up the ticket money and what was in the collecting bag at the table. The guttering candle cast a faint radiance upon the Jazzers as they stood gathered round him. He built up little piles of silver and coppers from the pool of coins before him. He nodded cheerfully at Paula and Bill as they came in.

" Quite a good night, though some swine's put in the usual foreign coin. Been throwing his weight about at Boulogne I sup-

pose—think they're darn clever when they palm off the small change on us afterwards."

"That's why a plate would be better than a bag," Bella said.

"In some ways, but there's lots against it. Scares the poor ones from putting in anything if they see a bit of silver in it. And those who might put silver in the bag probably wouldn't if they saw how much of the total's only copper. No, this way's best, but I hope the swine who did it gets measles, and a wife who has twins."

"Will you tell him that I want to add £10 to whatever the collection is to-night. I've got my cheque book in my bag," Paula said in Bill's ear, so he went nearer and whispered her message to Percival.

"Well, I do call that a damned fine thing to do," he said as he finished counting; then he announced "£14 11s." The company stared at him.

"You've made a mistake, Perce. It's only four pounds eleven shillings," Charlie pointed out.

"No, fourteen pounds eleven shillings. A generous donor who shall be nameless has added a tenner. "There was a dead silence in the room till Bella burst out,

"Well, I never. D'you mean that those two have gone and done that? How awfully decent of them."

" It's not me, " Bill said ; " Miss Cranford wanted to show her appreciation of your performance." They crowded round Paula, shaking her hand and thanking her. She was ashamed. Her money made her feel like that at times. She remembered what it meant to have barely enough to exist upon, and how a few unexpected shillings made you feel god-like. Her gift put the whole company in a good temper. They were ready for the party.

" We've just time to get some booze at the Red Fox. Ma Trixie'll always let us have it till eleven if we go to the side door," Charlie explained to Bill.

" Well, let's change quickly and double around there," Jack said. The girls were already slipping their ordinary dresses over their heads. They were experts at changing in the presence of an audience. They shook their jazz costumes downwards and stepped out of them. Bill thought he had never seen anything more respectable. While they were doing this, Paula wrote out a cheque for Percival. There were exclamations and some laughter from the other room into which the men were crowded.

" Come on, Bella, you and me'll hop around to our rooms and get the crème de menthe—we'll be at J.and C.'s room as soon as they will," Suzette said.

" Right you are, dearie—ready in a jiffy. You two'll wait for the boys, won't you ? "

" Yes. I expect we'd better," Paula said.

The next moment Bella was dressed and both girls went off arm in arm laughing. Paula looked at Bill and smiled. Tom Bellingham came out of the other room.

" You have a lovely voice. I enjoyed your songs so much," she said. He looked pleased. Percival walked in as she was speaking.

" You should just hear him in a room, Miss Cranford. Though it's not to my advantage, I've told him time and again his voice is wasted with us."

Tom turned away. It was a sore subject with him.

" D'you always get such a good crowd ? " Bill asked Percival.

" Not always. Saturday's a good night generally, if it's fine, but when it's wet—any way it's been all right this week," and he smiled gratefully at Paula as he put the cheque she handed him into his pocket book.

" A risky game though, a risky game."

When the men were all ready, they went outside and Percival extinguished the candle and locked the door. It was chilly in the open air after the close atmosphere of the shed and everyone shivered.

" Now for the funesky," Charlie cried and

led the way across the lawn. Paula found herself next to Tom. He looked moody. Percival's remark stuck in his mind. He thought,

" Good Lord. Don't I know I'm wasting my voice. Suzette won't ever do anything definite. She doesn't care enough."

" Are you English, Mr. Bellingham ? " Paula asked him. She wanted to make him talk and forget about his voice.

" No, Irish."

" So am I, at least half of me. What do you do in the winter ? "

" Oh ! I get engagements. Last year I had one in an hotel at Bournemouth. They have an orchestra and a couple of singers there for the winter season. Quite a good job. You meet some decent people."

He did not explain that Suzette's cough had been so bad that the doctor said she must winter on the south coast and that the engagement at the hotel made it possible for her to do so. Suzette let him take care of her as a favour—and now and then he was allowed to kiss her. It took a Celt to find enough attraction in that situation to go on. He thought her the most beautiful woman in the world. So she was to him. He saw her always as he longed her to be. He was a Romantic. He believed utterly that Suzette had a soul and was a wonderful

human being. Anyway, his belief took him over the black moods that descend upon such natures, so probably it was all for the best. Paula may have understood something of what was passing in his mind. She thought,

" You can say almost anything when you know you're going to be dead in less than twelve hours." So she said,

" Miss Chalmers is rather a lovely girl, I think."

" Yes, she is, isn't she ? " he answered eagerly, " but she's got a rotten cough. Can't seem to get rid of it."

" Has she seen a doctor ? "

" Oh, yes. He says she mustn't live in London—wanted her to go to a sanatorium place. But she wouldn't go. She's kind of seemed to think that she mightn't get out easily. She hates being tied up in any way." He lowered his voice and said,

" I'm awfully fond of her, Miss Cranford. But it's no go. She's married already. The man's an utter washout."

" Bad luck. Can't she divorce him ? " He shook his head.

" They're Catholics. So am I, so there's no way out."

Paula was silenced by the finality of his tone. She thought,

" You can't argue about a thing like

that. Once you knock up against a religious idea there's nothing more to be said."

It had always puzzled her. This intangible something that kept people from doing what they wanted.

" You're not Catholic, are you ? " Tom asked.

" No, but even if I was I think I'd take my chance of happiness, and do without the ceremony, if necessary."

" I would, although it'd be a sin," he said," but she won't. She's awfully strict about that kind of thing."

Paula thought,

" No earthly use stirring him up about it. Only make him miserable."

" Well, I'm sorry."

" Maybe her husband'll die some time. He can't keep the pace he's going very long, I should think," Tom said.

They hurried a little to catch up with the others and caught them just as they reached the Red Fox.

Percival rapped on the side door, and in a moment or two Ma Trixie opened it cautiously. When she saw who it was, she gave a lewd wink and said,

" Come in, all of you. Nasty time of night to be standing out in the cold," and she winked again. They went inside—she threw open the parlour door. Mr. Hinkley was

reading the evening paper in an armchair by the fire. He had his coat off and his waistcoat unbuttoned. Paula thought,

" I wonder what it feels like to have a stomach the size of his ? "

He nodded to them genially enough, but kept his pipe in his mouth. The men were whispering to Ma.

" Well, I'll fix it for you. Though I'm a damned sight too good natured. That's what I am. One of these days some sucker'll give me away, and then when I lose my licence who's going to help me ? " she said.

She went outside to the bar, accompanied by Percival making ingratiating noises. Bill came to Paula, who had been standing near the fire warming her hands. Her eyes were ringed with lines of fatigue. He felt the same wave of tenderness towards her that had already surprised him. He smiled at her.

" Looks as if we're in for another night of it," he said.

" I wish —" she said, and stopped.

" What ? "

" No," and she shook her head. The others drew near.

" Any luck to-day ? " Tom asked Mr. Hinkley.

He took his pipe from his mouth and put down the paper.

" Not too bad. Got the second in the 2.30, and Sparagota won the 4.30. Prices 10 to 1 and 6 to 4. Mustn't grumble."

" Sparatoga's a jolly nice filly—I got home on her twice last season," Paula said.

Mr. Hinkley looked at her.

" Yes," he said, " a good 'un—game as they make 'em, too." He put his pipe back into his mouth and picked up his paper.

Charlie said in a whisper to Bill,

" Old Hink don't approve of women. Not since Ma Trixie went off the rails with the tenor that was in a concert party down here three years ago. They made it up, seeing as it was her first offence and that this pub belonged to her. But he hasn't thought much of women since then."

Bill hoped that Mr. Hinkley would not hear what was being said. Ma Trixie came back just then with Percival, who had a basket full of bottles in his hand.

" Won't you and Mr. Hinkley come along with us, Ma ? We'll be quite a party to-night," Charlie said.

" What about it, Alf ? D'you feel like a bit of a spree ? " Her husband shook his his head, but muttered,

" You go along, Trix. I shall go to bed."

" All right then, Charlie, I'll come. I'd love to. Mr. Hinkley, he won't though, but if you don't mind me being on my lonesome,

I'm game." The men chorused their approval.

" Well, wait a mo, while I get my tata on. I'll bring along a drop of something if one of you boys'll carry it. The basket's full already," she said and waddled out of the room.

" I say, have you heard this one ? " Jack said to Mr. Hinkley.

" There were two blokes talking together and one said, ' I say, Bill, have you heard that this 'ere Lady Godiva's going to ride through the town-to-morrow on a 'orse, completely naked ? " and the other said,

" ' Is she now ? Well, I think may be I will come along ; I ain't seen a 'orse for months.'" Mr. Hinkley heaved with silent mirth ; the others shouted with laughter.

" That's the hell of a good story," Paula said to Bill. Ma Trixie came in and wanted to know what the joke was, so it had to be repeated. After the laughter had subsided, Percival said,

" I think we ought to be off now or the girls'll be waiting on J. and C.'s doorstep." So they said goodbye to Mr. Hinkley and went out. Ma Trixie walked on one side of Paula and Bill on the other.

" Nice place, Hove. D'yer know it well ? " Ma Trixie inquired.

" No, hardly at all. Must be a nice place

though, judging by the number of people who've told us so to-day," Paula said.

" Your car broke down, Percival tells me."

" Yes, the magneto went phut."

" Pity. Delayed you, hasn't it ? "

" Yes, it has rather."

Bill thought he had better draw Ma Trixie's fire to give Paula a rest.

" You must have come across some queer people in your job, Mrs. Hinkley," he said.

" Yes, indeed, and see the worst side of them too. It's rare to find a human being who's the better for drink. But there, it takes all sorts to make a world, don't it ? As I say to Mr. Hinkley sometimes, he and I ought to see the best in people, for their weakness is our strength, so to speak, in the liquor trade, and it's the same in a lot of others."

" Yes, that's true," Bill said.

" True, I should just think it is. After all it isn't the T.T.'s who pay for our rent and little extras, not by a long chalk it isn't. Well, there's one thing, you get to know human nature pretty well in our business. The booze loosens a man's tongue faster than a pretty woman can. And generally the thing that makes 'em drink's the same. I don't mean the drunkards, they don't count. Aren't many of them about, anyway. No, it's sorrow makes men and women booze.

And sorrow, nine times out of ten, means love. Isn't that queer ? The thing human beings get most happy about is the thing that makes them miserable soonest."

" Life's the hell of a bad joke, isn't it ? " Paula said.

" Yes, you've about said it," Ma Trixie answered, and she turned and looked with kindly eyes at Paula's white exhausted-looking face.

She thought,

" Yes, you know all about sorrow, poor thing." They walked in silence till Bill said,

" I think if I worked in a pub all the time I'd be a teetotaller." Ma laughed.

" Oh, no, you wouldn't. You couldn't bear it if you were ; not if you'd got a heart in you. When you have men telling you all about the things that hurt them, so's they have to drink, I tell you, it would send you barmy if you didn't get yourself a bit hazed now and then in the listening. Oh ! they're pitiful. Men who want girls who won't look at them, men who are too old, and fellows who aren't men at all, and wish they were. Women don't give themselves away as much, but it's nearly always the same tale when they do. Some fellow they're still in love with who doesn't care about them any more. Oh ! it fair makes me want to cry

sometimes. My Aunt, I'm a cheery little comic to-night! There's another side to the life as well. When the crowd in the bar get gay, and Pa gives out the prizes to the winners in the weekly sweep ; and someone puts a penny in the automatic piano ; and a lot of the crowd get singing. Oh ! yes, it's as good a life as most, I expect."

By this time they had reached the house in which Jack and Charlie had apartments. Three figures came running towards them. It was Bella, Suzette and a third girl.

" You have been a time. We'd just about decided to drink the crème de menthe" Bella said.

" We met Peggy and brought her along." She was introduced to Bill and Paula as Miss Davison. She was a tall blonde. Ma Trixie got them aside and whispered,

" She's the soprano from the Magpies. That's the concert party at the other end of Hove. Terrible time they've had, pore things. A high tide washed most of their show away one night. When they went for rehearsal next day they found all their costumes ruined by the water, half the deck chairs gone and the lighting done for. Nothing insured either, except the chairs which didn't belong to them, 'Ad to have a benefit for them on the Pier, a whip round in the Red Fox, and the Jazzers gave a

performance for them too. Good-hearted old thing, Percival, even if he is a bit ponderous. But that Suzette, my gawd, that girl needs a good hiding to my way of thinking. The dance she leads pore Tom, though it's largely his own fault, as I've told him."

Jack and Charlie having obtained the consent of the landlady to the party, they all trooped into the hall. Paula shuddered. It was a typical cheap seaside lodging house. An odour of Irish stew and yellow soap and seaweed lay heavily upon the air. Paula thought,

" Why do they always have shiny mustard-coloured paper on the walls and light brown grained paint ? " They went up the stairs to the third floor.

" You ought to be a good young man, Charlie, living amongst the stars," Ma Trixie said as she puffed upwards.

" Don't you believe it, Ma. I'll soon show you I'm not."

" Oh ! go on—and no misbehaving if you please, or out I go," she said. Charlie threw open a door.

" Welcome to our abode of lovensky. Tut, tut," he said. The room looked larger than it was because of its scanty furnishing.

A double bed with a dingy white honeycomb counterpane filled one corner. A

washstand, a shabby chest of drawers and two cane-bottomed chairs completed the rest of the furniture. Two worn wicker trunks stood against the wall. From the hooks on the door hung the few clothes possessed by Jack and Charlie. The window was shrouded in the inevitable imitation Nottingham lace curtains. A piece of threadbare carpet covered the centre of the room. The cheap-jack overmantel held photographic groups of the incredible-looking people landladies alone seem to possess as relatives. There were also a number of portraits of flashy young women. These last were, of course, the property of Jack and Charlie, who at the moment were hastening about collecting things for the party to sit on.

" Light the fire, Tom, there's a good chap ; you'll find matches on the mantelpiece." Tom lit the gas fire and found a seat for Suzette. Jack and Percival were out of the room fetching glasses. And at last they were all seated and provided with drink. The bottles had been put on the top of the chest of drawners. There was gin, whisky, port, lemonade, and a couple of syphons. Also Suzette and Bella's crème de menthe. Someone had produced a large bag of biscuits.

Bill thought,

" There seems to be enough drink there to do some damage. Hope to God Paula won't pass out."

After the first round of drinks they began to pair off in couples. Jack took Peggy on his knee and as soon as the atmosphere thawed he began to cuddle her openly. Bella let Percival hold her hand while she kept up a running line of backchat with Charlie, who was talking to Ma Trixie. Bill and Paula sat next to each other near the fire. Suzette and Tom remained a little outside the ring formed by the rest of the party. Suzette drank gin between fits of coughing and Tom sat near her without speaking.

Charlie put down his glass after a long drink. He smacked his lips.

" Mother always said I was weaned on salt fish. I've learned to believe what she told me," he remarked. Bill laughed, he thought it was a good remark. Paula smiled too—she whispered to Bill,

" Markham might have said that, only it'd have been with the Oxford accent."

" It was funny, but not witty. Suppose real wit's profound," he replied.

" Of course, Markham's like the rest of his race. Got a repetition complex. Repeats other people's jokes and his own good remarks again and again. Tells them damn well too, but it makes one want to scream if you

see much of him. He can't bear saying nothing."

" I hate Jews," Bill said.

" I like them. Most of my best friends have been Jews."

" Shall I get you another drink ? " She nodded and handed her glass to him.

" Don't know what's left. Gin, I expect."

" That'll do." He brought her the drink.

" The soda's run out, so I added water. Is that all right?"

" Yes, thanks."

" Wish Tom'd sing us something. Always makes me think of angels and that, when he does," Ma Trixie said. Tom shook his head.

" I won't sing to-night, if you don't mind."

" He's in one of his purity moods, blast his eyes. For Gawd's sake, fill our glasses up before I pass out," Bella said. So the glasses were refilled and the party became noisier and noisier. They shouted and laughed. Jack, who had been born in South Africa, was holding forth on the evils of that country.He said rather vaguely, but darkly,

" Ruin of South Africa is due to parsons. Whole bloody country's run by them—can't tell you what influence's like—know of one chap, parson fellow—suffered from hay fever."

" What's hay fever ? " Peggy asked.

" Sneezing, that's hay fever," Jack explained.

" What you think the natives did in the town where this parson who'd hay fever lived ? Cut down all the pepper trees round about, as smell made parson sneeze, cut down every one, wasn't a pepper tree left for miles, scandalous. Left the filthy country soon as I could—wouldn't stay where there weren't any pepper trees."

" I advise you to cool your head outside in the hall, old boy. You'll feel better," Percival said.

" Better not wake Mrs. Black sneezing in the passage," Charlie warned him solemnly.

" We must be drinking poison. I'm getting completely blotto, Bill," Paula said.

" What about leaving off ? I'll get you a biscuit. You've had the hell of a lot of booze, you know."

" Something in what you say. Now and then, my dear, you say thing that indicate that you're less of a moron than I'd thought."

" You're too drunk, Paula, for me to take offence," he said. She smiled at him when he brought her some biscuits.

" Didn't mean it. Sorry," she said. By and by Bill got up and went out of the room for a minute. Paula looked across at Tom. Suzette was sitting on his knee, but he was

making no attempt to hold her. He did not dare, because he knew that she had only to feel his touch and she would slip off his knee in a fury. He wondered why a man always wanted to touch a woman he cared about. It seemed right to have your hand over her breast. He knew he was drunk and kept profoundly still. He was afraid that he might lose his head and hold her as he wanted to. Suzette was drunk also.

" You're as mum as a mute," she said, and leaning towards him she kissed his mouth. Paula turned her head away. She found Ma Trixie by her side.

" My God, how that bitch leads him on. Did you see how he didn't dare return her kiss ? If he had, she'd probably have made a scene."

" But she kissed him first."

" I know, but that don't matter to her—she wants what she kisses to be a stone, not flesh and blood. Oh ! she's as mean as they make 'em. I suppose some kind friend has told you all about me by this time ? "

" No."

" Well, then I'll tell you myself before anyone else does. You're unhappy, so maybe you'll understand." Paula saw that Bill had come back into the room. Ma Trixie went on,

" It happened so oddly, dearie. There

was a concert party here. One of their boys got pleurisy. There wasn't nobody to look after him at his lodgings, so I let them bring him to the Red Fox and looked after him myself. I don't know how it all began —I just felt motherly towards him at first. He was ill and helpless and I did everything for him. Oh ! I was an old fool, I suppose. Anyway, he began to get fond of me. I've only got to look my age this last year or so. Let my figure go and didn't bother. Then he started to make love to me. Suppose I led him on a bit, more or less unconscious like. There were plenty of opportunities with me getting up at night to give him warm drinks and medicine. I forgot all about Mr. Hinkley and everything. Just being loved again as if I was a young girl made me potty. Suppose it was a kind of last fling. Nature's a bit of a huzzy and plays the dickens with you sometimes. He had such lovely eyes and a smooth skin, kind of downy. Oh ! he was beautiful, the rascal. I've nothing but kind thoughts about him now. That shows you he wasn't really a bad 'un. In the end we decided to go off for a week-end when he was better. Well, we did. Mr. Hinkley found out and followed us. He came the second day. Didn't make any difference to me then, I'd found out what a fool I'd been. The

youngster was only twenty, and I knew I was more than twice too old for him. One night'd shown me that." She stopped and stared across the room at nothing. Paula wondered what unhappy memory lay behind her silence. Then she went on again,

" So when Mr. Hinkley came, he sent the boy off, and we had it out. I went back with him. Don't know what the hotel people thought, I'm sure. Made him understand after hours and hours of talking that it was a last fling—that I'd been crazy and was sane again. Poor Pa, he was horribly upset. Couldn't make head or tail of why I'd run off and then didn't mind coming back. Couldn't explain to him or anyone why I was cured, but there it was. He's fond of me and I know his ways and make him comfortable, so he didn't want to divorce me—and I went back with him. Though it rankles in Mr. Hinkley's mind—he'll never really forgive me for making him look a fool. Never says anything, but I know. See him staring at me sometimes in a questioning kind of way. A pity altogether, but Nature's such a huzzy—we thought we could hush up the scandal, but of course it got about at once. Though who cares a damn about what the swine say around here ? " She stopped and Paula saw that she was weeping. She heard Charlie say,

" There's Ma getting maudlin again." Bill was standing near. He must have heard the whole story. Paula looked at him. He stared back. She thought,

" He's thinking about his wife—surely all he's hearing about women having temporary affairs will make him see things in proportion.

Bill thought,

" Poor old Ma. Damnable for a woman when she gets old. Wish to God I knew what Laura's doing now."

Bella left Percival and came over to Ma Trixie. She put her arm round her shoulders and stroked her hair.

" There, there, Ma, don't you take on so. You mustn't be sad. You're a nice old girl, and a good pal to us, and we all love you. That's true, isn't it, boys ? "

They shouted " Yes." They were all drunk and sentimental and feeling well disposed towards the world. Even Suzette said,

" Ma's all right. Don't know what we girls'd do for the rent without her some Saturday nights."

They gathered round the weeping woman. Her hair had become disordered and her cheeks were red and tear-blistered. Yet not one of them saw her as she really was, a drunken old woman. They tried to cheer her up with gin. As, however it was

not a particularly good drink for that purpose, it failed to do so. At last Paula whispered to Percival,

" Oughtn't she to be taken home ? I'm afraid she's getting worse." He took a deep breath and pulled himself together.

" Come along home, Ma. Mr. Hinkley will be wondering where you are. It's half-past one," he said gently. The mention of the time sobered her miraculously. She got up and began to straighten her hair in the mirror in her handbag, saying as she did so,

" Half-past one, well I never. Mr. Hinkley will be sending out a search party."

She put on her hat and fur coat and walked fairly steadily towards the door.

" Here, wait half a mo, Ma, and we'll see you home," Bella said.

Paula passed her hand across her face—she was utterly weary.

" Wonder if the car's ready, Bill. Don't think I can drive even if it is."

" That's all right. I booked rooms at the hotel after dinner, because I thought you mightn't want to go on to-night."

" Thank God for that." The party was over.

They all began to put on their hats and coats. The room looked ghastly. Some of the dead bottles had tumbled over and to

different corners. A few half-empty glasses has been knocked on their sides and the contents spilt on the floor. The grate was strewn with cigarette ends and the air thick with smoke and the fumes of alcohol.

Charlie looked round,

" Bit of a messenski."

" But we've had a lovely evening, Charlie, haven't we ? " Bella said.

" Rather." When everyone was ready, Bill and Paula had to shake hands again and again. They wondered if the leave-taking would ever be over. At last it was, and they all trooped down the stairs. The Red Fox lay in the opposite direction to the Royal and so did the ways of the rest of the party. At last Bill and Paula found themselves left with only Percival.

" I go your road for a bit," he explained. Paula was beyond speech—she just hung on to Bill's arm and walked along doggedly.

" Well, it's been a real slap-up evening, though I'm afraid Miss Cranford's very tired," Percival said.

" Yes, it has been good. I'm afraid she is pretty tired," Bll answered. When they reached Maybury Avenue, Percival stopped.

" I turn off here. You take the next turn ing and walk straight on till you get to the Royal. You can't miss it. It's been a real

pleasure to meet you and I hope we'll see you both again some time. I won't try and thank you any more because I know you must want to get along." He shook hands with both of them, then turned off down the road. They started to walk along again.

" Not a bad little man," Paula said.

" No, not too bad. How d'you feel ? »

" Pretty bloody. My lips are numb and there's a gap between what I'm saying and me."

" You must be tight. Never mind, we're nearly there." They were silent until they reached the hotel.

" Now I must pull myself together," Paula said, and she let go Bill's arm and walked along alone.

" I say, the car's in the yard—so it's all right again," he exclaimed.

" Yes. They've been pretty quick."

Bill rang the night porter's bell at the side of the hotel door. By and by the porter opened it for them.

" We've booked two rooms here for the night."

" Yes, sir, names of Cheland and Cranford. Rooms 19 and 21. The head porter left a message for you that your car was ready and is in the yard, sir. Will you follow me this way, please."

He went up the stairs to the second floor.

All Paula noticed was the pairs of boots or shoes that stood outside nearly every door. She tried to count them. Presently the porter unlocked the door of No. 19 and Paula found herself in a bedroom.

" Good night," Bill said, and went on to his room. Then the porter's footsteps sounded outside her door again till they gradually died away in the distance. She went over to the mirror and stared at her reflection. Her face was dead white, and the pupils looked huge. She had to shut one eye before she could focus well enough to see herself clearly.

She thought,

" God, I am disgustingly drunk." She took off her hat and coat and went to the washstand. She poured out a basin of water and plunged her face into its coolness. After a few minute she felt less fuddled. So she went over to the window and looked out. The room faced on to the main Hove Street. There were shops on the opposite side. Above, the sky was a deep blue. In the moonlight the houses looked as if they had been sculptured out of black and silver rock.

She thought,

" It's odd, but I've forgotten about Phil most of the day. I think Bill's had Laura in

his thoughts constantly. I'm not going to let him come with me any further. I'ts too absurd. He must go back and have some nice normal children like himself. I'm sure his wife's a damned charming woman. And she can't be too deadly respectable if she's had an affair with someone else. Poor Bill, he's so nice. I'm afraid he's the hell of a lot to learn yet. Now what am I going to do ? Slip off without letting him know and probably give him a complex for life, or have it out with him ? The first would be easier, but suppose I must do the second." She looked at her watch ; it was 2.15.

She thought,

" I'll get an hour's rest now and at the end of that time I ought to be more or less sober. Then I'll go and wake Bill up, talk to him and get away from here by four o'clock." She came away from the window where she had been standing. She gave a deep sigh, then going over to the bed, took off her shoes and lay down. She closed her eyes. It was the first time since the evening before that she had been alone for any length of time. It surprised her to find that she had gained a kind of release from her unhappiness. She felt a sense of excitement—something between the feeling she had experienced at times when waiting for the starter's signal before a motor race, and the feeling

she got before going on a holiday to a new country. She was thinking quite clearly. Her brain worked smoothly—she knew at last why she had always been a failure ; she was too introspective, she expected too much from people she loved, she dreaded the change in their feelings, which from the outset of a relationship, she expected ; this attitude had always made every human contact impossible once her emotions were involved ; she knew that she had not been a good enough human being for close friendships, that she made unhappiness for those she loved. She knew that she was an introvert, that from childhood she had relied upon fantasies to make life bearable ; that she was a Romantic who idealised the people she loved in order to go on loving them. She knew that it had been a desperate mistake to seek close contacts with people, made as she was.

She thought,

" I ought to have walked on a path by myself and not tried to know people except in the way of ordinary social intercourse. I ought to have gone alone until I was mellowed through experience and had achieved real self-control. But, after all, would I ever have known this without the bitter lessons I've had ? Suppose I ought to have known, ought to have remembered what

my people were like and realised that it meant I should need more self-control and knowledge of myself than other people needed. Instead of which I've just let myself go to pieces. I'm practically a drunkard. At times I've found a relief in actual physical pain, because it's driven out the agony of existence from my consciousness. I'm so neurotic that I'm really glad to leave life in this violent way. How silly it all is ; how incredibly stupid I've been. Why did I ever have to come into the world ? She knew that this was the cry of a weak human being and she knew that she was a coward, and once again she thought,

" I'm glad I'm going to die. I'm frightfully glad."

At three o'clock she rose. After tidying her hair in front of the mirror, she put on her hat and coat. She took her fountain pen and her cheque book out of her handbag and made out one to the hotel for £2, and one to the garage for £5.

She thought,

" That ought to cover everything all right."

Then she crept to the door with her shoes in her hand and very softly opened it and moved noiselessly along the passage. She knew Bill's room must be the next but one to hers, but she wondered what she would

do if by some mischance it was not—she could just make out the figures twenty-one on the door. She turned the handle slowly, hoping he had not locked it. Once inside she bent down to put on her shoes.

" Who's that ? "

" It's me, Bill," she went up to the bed and stood there. After that their voices did not rise above a whisper.

" I'm sorry to disturb you, but I must talk to you."

" Why have you got your hat and coat on ? "

" It's all part of what I want to talk about. May I sit down ? " He made room for her beside him—she took off her hat and put it down on the bed.

"What do you want to say, Paula ? "

" It's difficult. I want to choose my words carefully." He felt for her hand and held it, gently stroking her fingers. He thought he knew what she wanted to say.

" Go on, my dear." Her next words startled him.

" Look here, Bill, I don't want you to come with me any further." She felt curiously breathless as she said it, as if she had cut herself adrift from a safe anchorage.

" Don't be silly, dear, I'm coming with you."

" No."

" Why not ? "

" Because you'd be a fool if you did. Listen, Bill, since last night you must have realised that your wife's simply like a lot of other women. No worse. Because you've put her on an impossible pedestal it doesn't mean that she isn't a decent person in her own way, although it mayn't be exactly your way. Why, even that poor old Ma Trixie, you heard what she told me to-night. No, Bill, you've got to go back and try to make things up. You're a decent normal person. There's no need for you to go committing suicide. You're not a weakling." Bill was disturbed. All the doubts that had come to him since he has been with Paula flooded into his mind more strongly than ever.

" I don't see that anything you're saying makes any difference at all."

" Bill, supposing you hadn't told me you'd come with me, wouldn't you have been on your way back to your wife by now ? "

" I don't know," he said stubbornly.

" Well, I do, my dear ; of course you would. And if you think I'm going to let you come any further from a false sense of pride on your part, you're mistaken. Look here, Bill, if I liked I could have crept away by now without you knowing anything about it, but I thought it would be rotten."

" Oh, no, you couldn't. I was awake. I'd have heard you." They were silent for a moment till he said,

" I don't see why you don't want me to come. I thought we'd settled the whole thing last night." She shook her head.

" I hadn't heard your story then. I didn't know what sort of a person you were. If you hadn't been overworking and tired, you'd have stood up to the shock you got and not thought of suicide as the only way out at all. Bill, you're a healthy-minded person, I'm not. Surely you must see the difference. I can't let you do this thing. After all, there's your wife to consider as well as you." He started to interrupt, but she went on,

" No, listen, this is too vital a matter for me to shilly-shally about because you're going to say it's none of my business. On your own showing you've failed your wife pretty badly. Probably much more than you know. You say she wanted children and you didn't. Bill, I think that's one of the worst ways in which a man can fail a woman. As long as there's no reason against having them, I mean real poverty or rotten health what excuse can there be ? How do you know how much she wanted one ?"

" She could have told me about it, if it was as bad as that," he said slowly.

" You know it's not a thing she could have

done at all. After all, my dear, a woman has a fierce sense of pride over that particular thing. If you didn't want them, well, you didn't and the fonder she was of you the less likely she would have been to argue about it."

" That's probably true."

" Tell me, what did she do with herself all day long ? "

" God knows now. I thought she spent her day in the way women like her usually do. Shopped in the morning, lunched at home or with friends—we've lots of friends—then played tennis, or called or something in the afternoon. I was at home nearly always in the evening. She seemed quite happy. We went away for the week-end sometimes, otherwise I played tennis with her or sat around and read."

" Is she interested in architecture ? "

" Good Lord, no. Why should she be ? "

" I don't see why not. You must have something in common besides tennis, or you wouldn't still be so much in love with her."

" Not necessarily. And, anyway, supposing I'd been a postman or a policeman, I'd have been fond of her just the same, but you wouldn't have expected to hear she was keen about either of those jobs."

" Surely it's rather different. But tell me,

what else besides games and social interests do you both care for ? " Bill sat up on his elbow—Paula was gazing down at the floor. The light was too dim for him to see her profile clearly. He thought hard for a moment.

" I can't think of anything really serious that we were both keen about," he said. She sighed.

" You know, Bill, for a human being not entirely devoid of intelligence you've been rather blind, don't you think ? "

" Well, it didn't seem necessary to find deep interests like that, Paula. We've been awfully happy playing about together."

She went on as if she had not heard him.

" You haven't even the excuse of your parents being a bad example—why, you told me yourself how they both worked together when they were alive."

" Yes, they did. The parish would have gone to pot if Mother hadn't taken her part in it."

" Didn't you ever do any of your work at home, Bill? You must have gone in for competitions and so on. Didn't you do that kind of thing in the week-ends ? " He felt ashamed as he said,

" No, my dear, I didn't. There were lots I ought to have entered for. But I'd plenty to do in the firm. I did mean to, of course, in

the beginning, but being happy's bad for for you in a way, I suppose. I stopped being ambitious when I got married. When I left the office I hardly ever thought about my work until I went back again."

" You see, I thought your wife would have been bound to see something of your work, but if you confined it so completely to your office, of course she couldn't. I didn't know that a person with a constructive job and mind like an architect has, would adopt the attitude of the ordinary business man. The few I've know have been different. They cared, Bill, a lot." He felt very humble.

" I'm rather a beastly human being, I'm afraid."

" It's a pity ; of course you're not, but you seem to me to have just asked for trouble."

" What you're getting at, Paula ? " he said after a silence ; " is it that you think I've treated Laura as a relaxation only ? "

" Yes, but it's worse than that. You've not treated her as a reasonable decent human being at all. She had the instinct to create and you denied it her. You've just used her, my dear, there's no getting away from that. Then when she got bored, because she hadn't enough real interests, she turned to this other man, who, for all you know, may have given her those deeper interests. Bill, you

can't commit suicide yet. You've the hell of a lot to make up to her."

He squeezed her hand hard and was silent. She went on speaking slowly under the urge of expressing herself not to Bill, but to something wider and deeper than the comprehension and judgment of a fellow human being.

It was almost as if she was preparing her defence to meet a criticism of what she proposed to do.

" We're still so crude. We don't know how to make happiness for ourselves or others. Just blunder about from one stupidity to another. I think that perhaps we're still suffering from the War more than we realise. Look at our generation, Bill, and the next ; by the next I mean the people who were born just before or during the War. Haven't they struck you as all hopelessly at sea ? As a whole we don't seem to have any moral values left at all—not much wonder, considering the War banged every preconceived theory to bits. What chance had we of keeping our heads when all around us we saw the extremes that are a part of it ? Excess and intense privation, ruthless discipline and loose living ; the highest awards made to men for the destruction of the enemy, and hanging the murderer for the same action of taking human life. Impris-

oning men whose conscience would not let them fight, and shouting that war was altogether wrong and must never again be allowed. The Church, too. What a failure! Crying from the pulpits for men to join up and help exterminate the Germans, and reading from the Gospels commands which said, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' How could we keep our heads in that damnable contradictory babel? And a pretty sort of condition it has left us in. Look at the girls to-day. They resent not having what they call the 'good time' we had during the War, when sexuel control from the top to the bottom of society went by the board in the cry of 'to-morrow we die.' They want to do the same thing now, although, if they get found out, the world makes them suffer for it, just as much as it made women suffer for the same thing before 1914. What are they to think? They find that a large proportion of the men with whom my generation would have mated were wiped out in the War, and the majority of those left have married. Because of this they see the youngsters with whom they should now be mating taken up by the older women. I think, from what I've seen, that the young men are flattered by the attention they receive from my generation. Of course, in the end, it's the girls

of their own age they marry, but until that happens they play about with women of experience, those of my own period who learned a slacker moral code during the War. They can go further with us than they dare with the younger girls, because we know what we're about. They feel it's not quite the thing to have a complete affair with a virgin. The result is that the young ones are throwing down the few remaining barriers in a kind of ghastly competition. My generation is damned, because it corrupts the others. Both our mothers and our sisters have been smeared with the poison. We've taught our mothers to smoke like chimneys and ape our dress and habits, and we've taught our baby sisters to swill down cocktails and behave like whores. Oh! Bill, it is bloody. Why the very prostitutes hate us, because the men need them so much less now that we're there instead."

"Hush, Paula," Bill whispered violently. "You're seeing everything out of proportion. It isn't bad as you say. It can't be. There are some decent men and women alive to-day. You know there are, my dear, you know there are."

"I'm not saying there aren't. But what I'm saying is, that as a whole, my generation of women is rotten to the core. Freedom came too quickly for us. We weren't ready

for it. We had no reserves with which to meet the deadly disappointment after the War of finding ourselves workless, and husbandless and useless. Those of us who had cared a bit about reconstruction and all that came down with even a greater bang, for we found that there wasn't going to be any reconstruction at all. That all the politicians could do was to try and get votes by slogans. Things like 'Hang the Kaiser and make the world safe for Democracy.' Democracy. Christ! what a farce. Of course, I know some women have won through all right. The new mothers have, and a tiny band of women who have got some profession they're dead keen on. But it's in the next generation of children that the chance of a better future lies. The only thing my sort can do is to contaminate them as little as possible. If only some wise Providence would wipe out with one sweep all the so-called women war-workers who are unmarried, or who, married and healthy, have purposely avoided having children, then there might be some chance of England pulling herself out of the moral mire she's staggering about in now." She stopped and Bill said,

" God, Paula, you are bitter! and you're exaggerating the whole position horribly. After all, the men are to blame as well.

Nearly everything you've said about the women could be said equally about the men."

"Perhaps, but does that make it any better? I like my own sex; maybe because of that one sets a higher standard of conduct for them than for men. But I believe my generation's damned, and it's quite likely that the generation of war-time children is damned too. I don't know, but I believe that the women I've spoken about are the plague spot. If only they could be got rid of in some way, there'd be a chance of health coming again. Bill, you're right, I am bitter and so are they. We sneer at goodness and decency whenever we come across it. We're bored with people who aren't bawdy. We call them prigs and prudes if they don't want to talk about copulation at lunchtime and buggery at dinner. We despise people who don't swill booze down as we do. Oh! hell, it's all so intolerably stupid." She was now beyond comfort, and Bill recognised it. They were both silent for a time. He could see her profile dimly silhouetted against the window frame. Her head dropped; her whole attitude was one of utter despair.

He thought suddenly,

"She's right to die; she at any rate is damned."

He said,

" Poor darling—I'm so very, very sorry."

" Please don't—sympathy will make me break down. I don't deserve it either, Bill. Just because you're weak there's no reason why people should be sorry for you. If I'd had a decent character I'd have overcome my handicap of bad heredity and all that. I'm just a hopeless egoist and I've let myself become a neurotic emotionalist." The arm Bill was leaning upon had gone numb, so he lay down flat and stared up at the ceiling.

" You seem to be seeing yourself in too dark a shade—so many things you've told me show you up as rather a good sort. Much better than lots of the people who are thought good."

" No, you're wrong. In other circumstances, I should probably have liked you to think that I'm clearing out from rather noble motives, but I'm too near extinction now to want it. Bill, I'm rotten right through, and I know it. I'm not going from any quixotic idea that because I'm part of the plague spot I ought to ; no, it's simply that I'm unutterably bored. Don't paint any pretty picture in your mind, Bill, of a despairing but noble female making a sacrifice. I'm just a deadly one ; I've tried all the possible sensations that aren't too revolting, and I can't get a kick out of any of them."

" It's no good, Paula ; you'll never make me see you like that, whatever you say." He saw her shrug her shoulders.

" Bill, you'll go back to Laura ? " He did not answer her question, but asked instead,

" Tell me, my dear, did you take me amongst all that crowd last night because you wanted me to see that Laura's affair was a pretty ordinary thing ? "

" Not at first, but once I'd heard your story I was anxious for you to think about what you were seeing in relation to your own difficulty."

" Well, it's worked. I want to go back and find out if I can start all over again. Paula, I love Laura so frightfully."

At his words she turned towards him and buried her face against his arm. He felt her tremble.

" I'm so glad, frightfully glad. I began to be afraid that your pride wouldn't let you give in."

" Paula, don't go. Wait a bit and try again, too. I'll do all I can to help you if you will. " She shook her head. He felt her tears on his hand. As on the night before, he stroked her hair without speaking. He knew a desolating sense of frustration. There was nothing he could do to help. Yet at the same time a feeling of elation rose

in him. He was going to live. Death faded away from his consciousness as something unreal, something that did not apply to him at all.

He thought,

"Laura beloved. I'll come back and see if you'll forgive me. If you'll let me have another chance, I won't fail again. God, what a fool I've been." He whispered to Paula,

"You've been so good to me, dear. I wish I knew what to do to help. I shall go back to Laura and ask her if she'll let me try again. I want you to know that you've made me see how rotten I've been. If Laura still cares enough, we'll try and have some children. I'll not forget you, my dear, and what you've done for me. If everything comes right, and some time I do become a father, I'll try to be a decent one, Paula. And whatever happens, I'm going to make myself into a better human being. You've let me see what a selfish person I am. I can't thank you, but you know I mean it."

She had stopped crying and now sat up. The room grew a little lighter.

"I must go, Bill, it's time." His elation vanished. A strangled sensation caught at his throat ; he put his arms around her with a fiercely protective gesture.

"Don't go. Oh ! Paula, don't."

" It's time, Bill." His arms dropped away from her. She rose and stood by the bed. It was still too dark to see her features, but her eyes gleamed faintly.

" I'm glad you're going back. I hope you will have children, and that you'll be happy. And, Bill, don't be distressed about me. I'm really glad it's time. I'm almost excited; once I'm on my say I shall be." She bent down over him, and suddenly they kissed each other desperately. For a moment she held his face between her hands. He thought she was going to say something, but she straightened herself abruptly and walked to the door. She opened and closed it without a sound. Bill found his heart was pounding ; he thought,

" My God, I can't let her go like that ! I ought to stop her somehow." But he knew that he must not move. It was Paula's affair. He must let her go. He whispered to himself,

" Laura, Laura." The tight feeling in his throat got worse. He turned over on his face abruptly and buried his face in the pillow. His shoulders shook convulsively several times before he regained his control. It was pretty beastly.

Once outside in the corridor, Paula crept back to her own room. She wondered what she should say to the night porter if she

met him on the way down. She looked at her watch: it was nearly four o'clock. She combed her hair and put on her hat. As she did so, she thought,

"He may get dragged into the inquest proceedings. Hope to God nobody heard me in his room. I'd better scribble a note to Tom and let him know how Bill came into it, so that he can advise him if he does get involved. Mightn't be a bad thing if he does. Ought to put things right with his wife if she finds he's in a mess through her!"

She wrote the note and put it in an envelope, previously addressed to Tom in her handbag. Then she scribbled on a piece of paper to Bill,

> "Go to Tom Rowland as soon as you return to town and give him the enclosed letter. You may need his advice. Read my letter to him yourself first. Thank you for everything. PAULA."

Then she went out of the room and slipped the note under Bill's door. After that she walked very softly along the passage. The night porter was in his lobby by the hotel entrance. When she saw him she said,

"I have to go to Newhaven to meet someone on the night boat from Dieppe. I shall be back in time for breakfast."

The porter may have thought it odd, but he simply touched his hat and opened the door for her.

Outside it was getting faintly lighter, with the steely grey that comes before dawn. It was very cold and made her shiver. She walked round to the hotel yard. Her footsteps rang out clearly on the flags. A heavy dew had fallen and the leather of the seats was beaded with moisture. After she got in, she found a duster in the pocket of the door and wiped the steering wheel, the gear, the brake levers and the seat. She switched on the head lights, and then the engine, and started it. She slipped into first gear and drove out of the yard. When she reached the sea front she turned left and took the road to Brighton. The sea was heavily shrouded in mist—she could hear the wail of a syren from some steamer. Hove looked desolate in the cold dank grey light. The engine of the Vauxhall was warming up and running beautifully. Paula wondered what would happen to Bill and what he would say to his wife. She thought,

" Phil's more likely to be furious with me than sorry when he hears, because he'll be so afraid he'll be dragged into the inquest ; I hope he isn't. A coroner's censure might hurt him professionnally, and that would be damnably unfair." She could imagine how pleased and excited the Crowd would be to have the news. They loved any kind

of sensation so long as it was about someone they knew personally.

She thought,

" Don't see how the jury can bring in a verdict of temporary insanity, all things considered," and for some reason the thought pleased her. It was momentarily growing lighter, and she accelerated. She wanted to reach the other side of Cuckmere Haven before five o'clock, so as to be certain of the cliff being deserted. The speed of the car was now a steady forty-five miles an hour. She reached Rottingdean. The sea was far out and lay in patches of wet dim silver between the black seaweed and rocks. The road rose steeply. It was bitterly cold. Little bungalows stood back from the cliffs looking domestic and peaceful. She came to Newhaven. From there the road swung inland for a new miles. It was nearly dawn. The downs rose sharply to a ridge, on the other side of which lay Lewes. Paula came to a fork and took the road that swept back again to the coast, until it came to Seaford. The town lay so silent that the sound of the sea was borne inland as far as the railway station. Paula's heart began to beat with excitement. She thought :

" Steady on, you fool, take it quietly or you'll have some silly smash before you get there."

She left the town on her right as she took the hill that rose towards Cuckmere Haven. It sloped again steeply just before the bend came which led away from the sea to Alfriston. It was at this point that Paula slowed down and brought the car to a standstill—she knew there was a gate on her right which she must open. She got out of the car. Her knees were shaking so much that she could hardly stand. She clenched her teeth to stop them chattering and walked over to the gate. The sky was becoming lighter and lighter. In a few minutes the sun would rise. She managed to open the gate, and climbing back into the car, drove through. She stopped again and returned to shut it. By and by the cattle would be driven down from the Hill Farm and the gate ought to be shut or they would stray into the road. Itwas a completely deserted spot at this hour. Paula knew it intimately. In the fields she had entered, there were two rough tracks. One led straight across the fields to the sea. The other wound up and up until it came out on top of the cliff seven hundred feet above the beach. It was this upper track Paula took. The short dewy grass was slippery and there were deep ruts in the chalky ground to be avoided. Her headlights were now of little use and she switched them off.

The mist had vanished from off the sea and the horizon lay a faint purple line in the distance. As she looked ahead, the sky was suddenly split by a golden crack, through which the sunlight poured. The moment this happened, the birds awoke with startling suddenness. A thrush called richly from a tiny wood on her right. A lark shot upwards, its notes falling in a cascade of sound as it rose. Colour streamed back into the hills and trees and sky.

Paula thought,

" God, it's so beautiful ! I'm glad I've seen it like this at the last." She had reached the top of the hill and stopped the car. The track went on eastwards. From where she sat she was about two hundred yards from the edge of the cliff. She stayed quite still ; then she looked at her watch. It was five minutes to five.

She thought,

" I'll wait till five." She got out of the car, but left the engine running ; she walked a little distance away and sat down in the grass. It was sopping wet with dew. She listened intently, as if to an orchestra, picking out the various themes and harmonies which made up the symphony of the Daybreak. She heard the waves lapping far out on the sand, and the cry of the seagulls and the whirr of their wings as they

swooped over the edge of the cliff and above her head: she heard the singing of the wind in the grass, and the chirruping an insect made in a patch of gorse behind her. The tiny cliff flowers began to shimmer in the light.

All the bitterness drained from her heart as she waited there. It was replaced by a poignant tenderness towards the whole world. The memory of Phil and the Crowd, and all the futilities with which she had filled her days, faded out of her mind for ever.

She felt very frightened. Worse than being chloroformed, and yet exhilarated at the same time.

In the distance from the Hill Farm she could hear the joyous barking of a dog and the silver tinkle of a sheep bell. A human being might be coming near and that meant it was time to go. She let her fingers sink into the fine grass, stroking it gently. It was soft and cold with dew. She put her hands to her face, which was burning. Her mouth had lost all its hard lines—she looked at peace and beautiful. She rose and walked back to the car.

The ground sloped very steeply to the cliff edge. She took off the brake and, as the Vauxhall began to move, put it straight into top gear. It slid smoothly away and she accelerated. The pace increased rapidly:

she held the steering wheel with firm hands, her heart no longer beat suffocatingly. Her eyes took in the blueness of the sea before her. Very deliberately, she let the golden kiss of the sun fall upon her eyes and dazzle her, so that she did not see when she had reached the edge. The car rushed forward into space and began to spin over in the air as it fell.

THE END

Printed in Paris
by the
Imprimerie Vendôme, 338 Rue Saint-Honoré